

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*



**FEBRUARY
2003**



A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

FEBRUARY 2003

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Cover: Temples in Dakshineswar seen from the Ganga. The divine site of the first 'awakening'.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 108

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No. 2

❧ Traditional Wisdom ❧

IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

नाविरतो दुश्चरितान्नाशान्तो नासमाहितः ।
नाशान्तमानसो वापि प्रज्ञानेनैवमाप्नुयात् ॥

Those who have not refrained from wickedness, the unrestrained, the unmeditative or those with an unpacified mind—such persons cannot attain Self-knowledge. (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.24)

The young bamboo can be easily bent, but the full-grown bamboo breaks when it is bent with force. It is easy to bend the young heart towards God, but the untrained heart of the old escapes the hold, whenever it is so drawn. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 91)

The potter shapes various forms with unburnt clay, but he cannot work the clay that has once been burnt. In the same way the heart that has been burnt in the fire of worldly desires cannot be acted upon by any higher sentiment, and is incapable of being moulded into any lovely form. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 79)

If you practise spiritual disciplines for some time in a solitary place, you will find that your mind has become strong, and then you can live in any place or society without being in the least affected by it. When the plant is tender it should be hedged around. But when it has grown big not even cows and goats can injure it. Spiritual practices in a solitary place are essential. (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi)

The growth of man can only be gauged by his power of living in the higher atmosphere where his senses are left behind, the amount of the pure thought-oxygen his lungs can breathe in, and the amount of time he can spend on that height. (*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, 194)

☪ This Month ☪

The Vedantic view of the cause and cure of misery is discussed in this month's editorial **Encountering Misery**.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features excerpts from 'Appeal to Higher Nature', an article by Swami Prakashanandaji, a eulogy of Swami Vivekananda, and a note on 'tejometer', an invention by Dr J C Bose.

In the concluding part of his inspiring reminiscences of his association with Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Kankhal, '**You Will Be a Paramahansa!**', Swami Sarvagatanandaji narrates the touching story of Swami Kalyananandaji's dog Bhulu. The author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston.

Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited South Africa to participate in the diamond jubilee celebration of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban. **Two Weeks in South Africa** details his experiences during the visit.

'The Curtain-raiser' is the second part of Swami Kirtidanandaji's reminiscences of the the early days of the Ramakrishna Mission in Along, Arunachal Pradesh, entitled **Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along**. Besides narrating the inception of the English-medium primary school there, the author describes the visit to Along of Swami Gambhiranandaji, the then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

The year 2002 marked the centenary of the first publication of the *Gospel of Sri Rama-*

krishna in Bengali. In his fact-filled and thought-provoking article **The First Hundred Years of the Immortal Gospel** Swami Prabhanandaji traces the evolution of this spiritual manual over these hundred years and describes its special features and the personality of M, its chronicler. The article is based on the author's two talks: at Vedanta Society of St Louis on 29 September 2002 and at Vedanta Society of Sacramento on 11 September 2002. A senior trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, the author has a number of books to his credit in Bengali and English. He is presently head of Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.

Jābāla Upaniṣad is the sixth and final instalment of the translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Incidents from the lives of Dhanurdas, Samartha Ramdas and Tukaram are featured in **Glimpses of Holy Lives**.

Swami Adiswaranandaji, Spiritual Leader of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, hosted on 22 September 2002 an 'Interfaith Service for Peace and Unity' as **A Tribute to the Spiritual Oneness of Humanity**. The participants included spiritual leaders from all Vedanta centres of the Ramakrishna Order in the USA, two swamis from India and distinguished representatives of different faiths. We are happy to publish a brief report of the event.

Encountering Misery

EDITORIAL

Life has its moments of misery and calamities. If some people suffer from physical pain, there are many with mental problems: anxiety, tension, insecurity, fear, disappointment at people not behaving as expected, things not turning out to their liking—the list is endless. The body acts on the mind and vice versa, doing their bit to compound the misery. As he cruises along life man expects favourable wind and a smooth ride. But there is many a storm, and often he runs into rough weather. When something undesirable happens to him or to his dear ones the natural question in him is ‘Why should this happen to me of all?’ No one will be happy with the question, ‘Why not?’

As Bhishma lay down on his bed of arrows, the Pandava brothers and Krishna stood around him. They saw tears flowing from the eyes of the great hero. Arjuna said to Krishna: ‘Friend, how surprising it is! Even such a wise man as our grandsire Bhishma—truthful, self-restrained, supremely wise, and one of the eight Vasus—weeps, through maya, at the hour of death.’ Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it. Bhishma replied:

‘O Krishna, You know very well that this is not the cause of my grief. I am thinking that there is no end to the Pandava’s sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer. A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God, and so I weep.’¹

Thus virtuous people are also not exempted from misery. Probably theirs is a greater share.

There are again natural calamities and ‘human-error’ accidents, claiming many an

innocent life. Misery thus being a part of life, a study of its cause and cure can make us better equipped to face it.

Three Kinds of Misery

The Sankhya philosophy identifies three kinds of misery: *ādhyatmika*, arising from our body or mind; *ādhibhautika*, inflicted on us by others—human beings or beasts; and *ādhidai-vika*, caused by natural calamities like flood, famine, cyclone, earthquake and the like. The last kind could also result from supernatural influences like evil spirits. Sri Krishna describes the world as *duḥkhālayam* (abode of pain, misery) and *aśāśvatam* (impermanent).² What is considered pleasurable today proves to be a source of misery later. Hence the epithet *duḥkhālayam*.

When not understood properly, the theory of karma may be thought of as promoting fatalism. Far from it. On the contrary, the theory throws the whole responsibility on our shoulders and goads us into shaping our destiny.

Theory of Karma: An Explanation for Misery

No discussion on misery is palatable when one is amid misery. Any discussion is bound to rebound with the rebuff, ‘Enough of your Vedanta.’ But it is precisely Vedanta that is going to help us face misery. So even when the life cruise is smooth it is profitable to know what Vedanta has to say about misery. That will brace us for the rough weather, the time when misery takes over.

The theory of karma is possibly the most satisfactory explanation for misery. Man is the maker of his destiny. Every action and thought of his leaves a subtle impression (samskaras) on his mind and these impressions keep deepening with repeated actions and thoughts. There are both good and bad impressions in the mind corresponding to good actions (and thoughts) and bad actions (and thoughts). The sum total of these impressions is what Swami Vivekananda defines as character. It is this sum total at any instant that determines what is our lot: our spouse, children, work, boss, subordinates, friends, work environment, and so on. That again determines the happiness and misery we experience in life, and accounts for disparities at the time of birth: some born with good perceptive faculties and some with bodily or mental defects.

Sri Krishna clarifies an important point in the *Gita*: 'God is impartial towards all, but those who worship Him with devotion live in Him and He in them.'³ He also emphasizes that God is the *unattached* substratum in man: 'The Self (God) is not the cause of the sense of agency of action, actions or fruits of actions. It is nature that does all this.' (5.14) By nature is

***Our miserable experiences in life are real
as long as the dream of life lasts. The
unreality of the experiences stand revealed
when the dream breaks on our awakening
to our real Self, the Atman.***

meant Prakriti, from which evolve the gross and subtle worlds and beings. In man, nature implies the composition of his mind, or the sum total of his impressions. Sri Krishna further makes it clear that the responsibility for meritorious and sinful actions rests squarely with man: 'The all-pervading One does not accept the sins or merits of anyone. Beings are deluded because their real divine nature is veiled in ignorance.' (5.15)

Sri Ramakrishna's words throw more light on the issue:

Good and evil apply to the jīva, the individual soul, as do righteousness and unrighteousness; but Brahman is not at all affected by them.

One may read the *Bhāgavata* by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous.

You may ask, 'How then can one explain misery and sin and unhappiness?' The answer is that these apply only to the jīva. Brahman is unaffected by them. There is poison in a snake; but though others may die if bitten by it, the snake itself is not affected by the poison.⁴

Another important point in the theory of karma is the fruits of actions: Every action or thought is bound to yield its result, whether we like it or not:

As a calf among a thousand cows
finds out the mother kine;
So deeds performed, good or bad,
will come and say 'I am thine.'⁵

And rebirth being the inevitable corollary of the theory of karma, the actions in the present birth can fructify in any birth, present or future. Our experiences in this life, therefore, could be prompted by our actions in this life or earlier lives.

A significant point can be discussed here parenthetically. When not understood properly, the theory of karma may be thought of as promoting fatalism. Far from it. On the contrary, the theory throws the whole responsibility on our shoulders and goads us into shaping our destiny. If the past impressions determine our present life, it logically follows that our present actions and thoughts will determine our future.

Not Everything is Explicable

Though the theory of karma offers a near satisfactory explanation, it needs to be remembered that not every experience of life can be

adequately explained by this law; or for that matter any law. Vedanta sets things in perspective. According to it, this world is like a dream, real as long as the dream lasts. Though real during the dream, dream experiences are negated as soon as the dream breaks and we wake up. Similarly, our miserable experiences in life are real as long as the dream of life lasts. The unreality of the experiences stand revealed when the dream breaks on our awakening to our real Self, the Atman. On waking up, we do not look for explanations for absurd dream experiences like our growing a pair of wings and flying in the air. Similarly, not everything in the world lends itself to comprehension and explanation. There can be no explanation as long as the world is real to us. But the problem ceases to exist for a knower of the Self. He does not look for explanations for his earlier miserable existence or other inexplicable happenings in the world. He has transcended them.

There is a related conversation in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Narendra's father had just passed away leaving the family in straitened circumstances. Sri Ramakrishna remarked to devotees:

The joys and sorrows of the body are inevitable. Look at Narendra. His father is dead, and his people have been put to extreme suffering. He can't find any way out of it. God places one sometimes in happiness and sometimes in misery. ... But to tell you the truth, this world is God's maya. And there are many confusing things in this realm of maya. One cannot comprehend them. ... There is so much confusion in this world of His maya. One can by no means say 'this' will come after 'that' or 'this' will produce 'that'.⁶

Utility of Misery

What then is the utility of misery? It is to draw our attention to the only reality in this miserable, impermanent world: God. Every

blow we get makes us wonder, 'The body which is very dear to us, our kith and kin, prosperity, name, fame, power, position—everything we consider real here and spend our energy and time on—is this all? Or is there any higher dimension and purpose to life?' It is then that we look to a being not affected by the

'The body which is very dear to us, our kith and kin, prosperity, name, fame, power, position—everything we consider real here and spend our energy and time on—is this all? Or is there any higher dimension and purpose to life?'

vicissitudes of life. We pray to God—though our conception of Him may be hazy—for relief from misery and, gradually, for clarity of mind and devotion to Him. When our conception of God undergoes refinement we begin to appreciate what Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*: 'God resides in the heart of all beings.'⁷

Misery is thus a reminder of the ultimate reality of God. It is in this context that Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi remarked, 'Misery is truly a gift of God. I believe it is a symbol of His compassion.'⁸ In Swami Vivekananda's words, 'the world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually.'⁹ Pandavas' exemplary mother Kunti braved innumerable ordeals in her noble life. Here is her unique supplication to Sri Krishna: 'O World Teacher! May disasters befall us always at every stage. For it is in such situations that we feel Thy presence, a vision that bestows freedom from rebirth.'¹⁰ Describing the world as *anityam* (impermanent) and *asukham* (a source of misery) Sri Krishna asks us to worship God.¹¹

Needed, a Change in Outlook

Misery being an inseparable companion of happiness, none is exempt from playing

host to it. Since God inheres in us as the Soul of our souls, misery reminds us of the reality of our divine nature and the evanescence of everything else.

This leads us to the corollary that the more we identify ourselves with the world, beginning from our body and mind, the greater will be our chances to play host to misery. Conversely, the less the identification, the less the misery. According to Sri Ramana Maharshi, everything that has to happen with the body has been predetermined; our option is whether to identify ourselves with the body or be detached from it.

'Let the Body and Pain Take Care of Themselves'

Sri Ramakrishna's life was a demonstration of his teaching 'let the body and pain take care of themselves; O mind, you abide in happiness.' He continually talked of nothing but God even amid the excruciating pain from throat cancer. Swami Turiyanandaji, whom his guru Sri Ramakrishna considered a yogi described in the *Gita*, emphasized in his letters this teaching of his Master. He stressed the need for regularity in spiritual practice whether the body is well or ill. Let the body be

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happy with the ailment, let *me* be happy with my spiritual practice—that is the idea.

The *Gita* defines yoga as 'severance of contact with pain, or sorrow'. (6.23) It adds that one is not shaken by even by the severest of afflictions when established in the Self, the source of endless bliss. (6.21-2) We find this validated in the lives of Swami Turiyanandaji and Sri Ramana Maharshi: they underwent surgery in full consciousness without the use

of anaesthesia, by just withdrawing their mind from the body.

Some Practical Ways to Encounter Misery

Faith in our higher Self: This is the sheet anchor of all other prescriptions. Swami Vivekananda never tired of emphasizing the glory of the Self. And he encouraged filling ourselves with strong, positive thoughts about our divine nature rather than harping on weakness:

Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thought enter into their brains from very childhood. Lay yourselves open to these thoughts, and not to weakening and paralysing ones. Say to your own minds, 'I am He. I am He.' Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare, 'I am He.' That is the Truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours. Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.¹²

Cultivating detachment: Detachment is not an exclusive privilege of a monk. A little detachment in everyone's life can help enhance sanity in life. One way to cultivate detachment is to offer all our actions to God. Sri Krishna teaches in the *Gita*: 'Whatever you do, eat, offer in sacrifice, give in charity or perform by way of austerities—offer that all unto Me. You will thus be-

come free from the auspicious and inauspicious effects of work that bind you. With your heart firmly set on renunciation, you will attain liberation and come to Me.'¹³

When his disciple M—the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—asked Sri Ramakrishna how to live in the world, the Master replied:

Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father

and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rama' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all.¹⁴

Selfless work: Doing our bit to help others get rid of their misery is a potent way to transcend our own misery. Swamiji held unselfish work as an independent means to God-realization.

Prayer for oneself and for others: Sri Ramakrishna revived the efficacy of prayer as a spiritual discipline. In almost every other page of the *Gospel* we find Sri Ramakrishna teaching us how to pray to God. Though God does not despise prayers to Him to be rid of misery, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna would rather pray for devotion to God and strength to live through the ordeal. Prayer for others as part of our own spiritual practices has a calming effect on our mind besides helping others.

* * *

In sum, cultivating love of God is the only way to transcend misery. We referred to Pandavas' sufferings at the beginning of this essay. How could they bear all that? Sri Ramakrishna says elsewhere in the *Gospel*: 'However much a bhakta may experience physical joy and sorrow, he always has knowledge and

the treasure of divine love. This treasure never leaves him. Take the Pāṇḍava brothers for instance. Though they suffered so many calamities, they did not lose their God-Consciousness even once.'¹⁵ *

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2. *Bhagavadgita*, 8.15.
3. *Gita*, 9.29.
4. *Gospel*, 101-2.
5. Quoted in *Atman Alone Abides*, ed. Swami Vid-yatmananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978), 134.
6. *Gospel*, 397.
7. *Gita*, 18.61.
8. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), 226.
9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.80.
10. *Vipadaḥ santu naḥ śāśvat-tatra tatra jagadguro; Bhavato darśanam yatsyād-apunar-bhava-darśanam.*
—*Bhagavata*, 1.8.25.
11. *Gita*, 9.33.
12. *CW*, 2.87.
13. *Gita*, 9.27-8.
14. *Gospel*, 81-2.
15. *ibid.*, 276.

After every happiness comes misery; they may be far apart or near. The more advanced the soul, the more quickly does one follow the other. *What we want is neither happiness nor misery.* Both make us forget our true nature; both are chains—one iron, one gold; behind both is the Atman, who knows neither happiness nor misery. These are *states* and states must ever change; but the nature of the Soul is bliss, peace, unchanging. We have not to get it, we have it; only wash away the dross and see it.

—Swami Vivekananda, *CW*, 7.11



Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago



February 1903

Appeal to Higher Nature

When the great hero Arjuna lost heart on the battlefield, Lord Sri Krishna with a divine smile inspired him with the words: 'Do not yield, O son of Pritha, to such passive attitude, it doth not befit thee, shake off the paltry faintheartedness and rise, O oppressor of enemies' (Chap. 11.3). Without words of reproach or condemnation, came out the sweet and life-giving words of hope and encouragement; the Lord tried to impress on his mind that such melancholy, on the battlefield, did not become a Kshatriya hero like him. He appealed to his higher nature and the hero shook off the mental torpor overshadowing his mind for a while, rose to fight and at last won.

In this tremendous battlefield of life, in this keen competition of nations to march onward, in this struggle for existence, we Hindus have lagged behind, nay, sunk deep into the abyss of despair; and the Voice which one day spoke through Sri Krishna, which speaks through sages and prophets who come down to this world to raise the human race to a higher platform, is coming to us today and proclaiming its message, 'Arise, awake, and going to the great ones, know the Truth,' and slowly raising the Hindu nation to a higher level than before.

Thanks to the missionaries who in their anxiety to bring light to the benighted heathens shower the words 'sin' and 'sinners' heavily upon us, and to the reformers who in their zeal to give an onward push to the society criticize and condemn bitterly all its weaknesses and defects, gloom upon gloom has piled in our minds, making the society dive deeper into the ocean of base cowardice and weakness! If we go into a dark room and cry out 'it is dark, it is dark' all the while, will the darkness go? That can never be. Let us bring in the light, and the darkness of a thousand years will vanish at once. Sri Ramakrishna once spoke to a Brahmo gentleman, 'A young man came to me with a Bible and read a little from it, but I got disgusted with the frequent use of the words "sin" and "sinners"; you too, I observe, use those words much.' Everyone knows that to err is human, we have frailties and defects, we make false steps in this thorny path of life. But what are the means and methods of correction—the panacea of the disease? That we are essentially divine, we are part and parcel of the Omnipresent Almighty, we are children of the Divine Mother, we have uttered the holy name of the Lord, sin and weakness cannot come to us—such should be our attitude. Constant remembrance of our higher nature and thereby always giving our minds good and pure suggestions enable us to overcome the ills of life.

People who have strong faith in themselves, who are conscious of their higher nature, have always become great. History is a standing witness to this fact. ...

And we Hindus have lost that faith through centuries of foreign conquest and slavery, faith that one day inspired a boy of five years with courage even to go to the house of the King of Death. Alas! we are today awfully lacking in that. Slavish dependence and base cowardice have entered into our marrow, as it were. Still in the midst of this despair and degeneration is heard the sweet yet solemn voice coming through the vistas of centuries to inspire us: 'O ye children of immortality! Hear even ye, those who reside in the higher spheres.' It urges us to shake off the idea that we are sinners and weak, which has hypnotized us for ages. It repeatedly asks us to remember that we are children of the King. We should not walk with the fearful and tottering steps of a beggar. Should we remain away,

should we turn a deaf ear and not respond to the call? Should we not learn to have unflinching faith in our higher nature and bring up our children from their very infancy with the idea of Nachiketas, with the ideas of *tvamasi niranjana* ('thou art stainless'), *tattvamasi shvetaketo* ('That thou art, O Shvetaketu')? Should we not go to the masses, our downtrodden masses, educate and tell them: 'O men, ye need not despair; ye are men, stand on your feet, ye have place in the society, ye are capable of doing higher and greater things; rise, O men, rouse your higher nature'? When we meet with a thief, a profligate, or a degenerate person, who is hated and condemned right and left by the society, let us, instead of projecting a current of hatred and blame towards him, address him with loving words, 'O child of immortality, O son of God, such actions do not become you. Infinite strength and purity are within yourself. Believe in that and be man.' Not condemnation but appeal to the higher nature is the way to make a man higher, nobler and purer in life.

—Swami Prakashananda

In Memoriam: Swami Vivekananda

We are extremely sorry to announce the death of Swami Vivekananda, the most enthusiastic and earnest champion of Vedantism. The labours of Swami Vivekananda in the field of Hindu religious reform are certainly admirable and his death will be mourned by all. His childlike simplicity, suavity of manners, willingness to confess his own faults and mistakes, all these virtues had endeared him to many sons of India, whether orthodox or reformer. The European missionaries had totally misrepresented Hindu religion in Europe and America and Swamiji's refutations were admitted to be sound and logical. It need hardly be said that the arguments of the Christian missionaries never stand the test of sound reasoning, and when they are likely to be defeated they malign advocates of other religions and by that method attempt to convince the world that Christianity stands uppermost in every respect. Swami Vivekananda had to confront such persons and encounter difficulties of a complicated nature in carrying conviction to sensible men that Hinduism was the purest of all religions. Swamiji explained the Hindu Yoga philosophy to the American public and earned an everlasting name as a fair critic and a profound philosopher. ... He was held in high estimation in every part of the country for pioneering a noble and a true cause. He was much deified in Bengal in spite of the efforts of some mischief-mongers to throw cold water over his admirable exertions. May his soul rest in peace.

—Native Opinion, Bombay, 9 July

Tejometer

Dr Jagadish Chandra Bose of the Presidency College, Calcutta, has not only enriched the domain of science and scientific research; he has likewise enriched the English dictionary by the introduction of a new term. And aptly enough, this new term is derived from a Sanskrit word 'tejas', which means light radiation. The latest invention, which will be of great service to optics generally, is styled 'tejometer', and is a kind of universal radiometer. The instrument in its general design—and this appears to be the basic principle of the new invention—closely follows the structural outline of the human eye. A spherical shell has an aperture in front of which, if it is intended to apply the instrument to the detection of waves of ordinary light, is fitted up a lens, in the axis of which at the back of the spherical shell is a microphone contact. Dr Bose says that his oddly named eye, fitted with contacts of the substances mentioned, is capable of detecting from beyond the violet down to the red in spectral regions, from beyond the violet down to the red in the domain of Hertzian radiation. *

—News and Notes

‘You Will Be a Paramahansa!’

Part 6: Kalyananandaji’s Dog Bhulu

Kalyan Maharaj’s dog Bhulu has a long history. From the day I arrived at the Sevashrama we had become good friends and she never left me. If anybody wanted to know where I was they would say, ‘Find out where Bhulu is.’ They would call out and Bhulu would either come or bark in reply. In the thirty acres of land—garden, guest house, dairy, library, hospital—nobody could tell where I might be at any point of time. So the most practical thing was to call to Bhulu and know from her where I was. She would accompany me for meals too. She had her own nice plate and I would give her bread, dal and other things; she would eat well and leave. Very constant, I tell you. Even when I went to office, Bhulu would take her place by the door.

The Garden Guardian

How she guarded the whole campus! Many people thought Bhulu only ate well and did nothing. Actually she was very watchful. I could see by her ears that she was alert to everything that went on in the compound. Whenever Bhulu entered the garden the monkeys would scamper away. She would chase them out whenever she saw them. She was black and large, and the monkeys were terribly afraid of her. But for her there was no way we could save the mangoes and bananas. When Bhulu died we had a big problem.

We instructed guests and visitors not to pluck flowers from the garden. We had also put up signs warning them about the dog. But some people took these things rather lightly; they believed ‘Maharaj is trying to scare us.’ Such people paid the price for sure. Once a small boy, son of a devotee, came to the garden and started plucking flowers. Bhulu appeared from nowhere and snapped at him.

She caught him by the pants and would not let go. The boy was howling like anything. We pacified the boy and everything was all right. I was very sorry that such a thing happened. Everybody scolded Bhulu harshly, but I could not, because I knew she felt she was protecting the place. However, one thing really beat me: Bhulu never harmed any patient, monk or employee of the Sevashrama. People would walk around without feeling threatened. I never knew how Bhulu could tell they were patients, employees or monks—those who stayed at the Sevashrama—swamis or brahmacharins. But besides these, she did not like anyone else getting into the garden.

Thieves Brought to Their Knees

One day we were all eating supper with some visitors from Calcutta. They were staying in the guest house. Halfway into her meal Bhulu rushed out of the dining hall. After supper we all went to the guest house and found the rooms wide open and two suitcases missing! We looked for them everywhere but could not find them. Surprisingly, Bhulu was nowhere to be seen. Normally she would follow me wherever I went. I shouted ‘Bhulu! Bhulu!’ and from far away, outside our compound, she barked. We all hurried outside. Bhulu had intercepted the two men who had stolen the suitcases. They had dropped the suitcases and were standing there shivering with fear. When we arrived on the scene, Bhulu came over to me wagging her tail. I ordered the two fellows to carry the suitcases back to the guest house. I knew them. One of them worked in our garden and the other used to come now and then. Then I told them to get out. Just imagine! Bhulu had heard the noise in the guest house, left her meal half eaten and

rushed out to investigate!

At the Railway Station to Meet Me

Though Bhulu accompanied me wherever I went, she never stepped into the shrine or the hospital wards. She would watch me from outside as I went from room to room and follow me. She was a constant companion, except when I went outside the Sevashrama. Once I had gone to Calcutta and was to return on a particular day. They were all saying, 'Narayan Maharaj will be arriving tomorrow. We shall take the doctor's horse carriage to bring him from the railway station.' And Bhulu understood their talk! Next day, before they arrived at the railway station Bhulu was already there—she had taken a shortcut. I don't know how she knew. This happened many times. Every time I came from outside, Bhulu would be waiting at the railway station. The monks said they never brought her with them; she came on her own. She would walk up and down the platform, where no dog was allowed, waiting. The moment she spotted me in a coach, she would trot alongside the train till it stopped and I got down. Oh, you had to see her! The moment I alighted she would jump on me wagging her tail hard. Then I would bend down and pat her. While coming from the railway station she would be allowed to sit in the back of the horse carriage. Wonderful, really.

Bhulu's Friend Lily

Earlier Bhulu had a friend, Lily. Lily was somewhat of an aristocrat. Nischayanandaji used to feed her from the table. There was a nice bowl meant for her. Lily died the day Kalyan Maharaj left for Mussoorie for the last time. He was never to return. She died that very morning. We had all assembled to see Kalyan Maharaj off. Bhulu came but Lily was absent. The previous night I had noticed that

she had suddenly taken ill, and the next morning I saw her lying down in front of the shrine. I went near and found her dead. We didn't tell Maharaj. After he left the doctor came and pronounced Lily dead; she must have died early in the morning.

Lily was a smart little dog, similar to a nice white poodle. She never ventured outside but kept to the verandas and preferred to curl up in Kalyan Maharaj's chair when she felt like it. Good for nothing—just like from royal families! They are well fed but good for nothing. Lily used to get biscuits, milk and other nice things from Maharaj while Bhulu would only get rough things, bones and dry bread. In fact, somebody once remarked, 'Lily enjoys special food and does nothing but Bhulu eats anything and works hard.'

Futile Plans to Get Rid of Bhulu

After Kalyan Maharaj's death, they wanted to get rid of Bhulu because they thought I was spending a lot of time with her. Every evening after I returned from the hospi-

The moment she spotted me in a coach, she would trot alongside the train till it stopped and I got down. Oh, you had to see her! The moment I alighted she would jump on me wagging her tail hard. Then I would bend down and pat her.

tal I would have a bath and give her a thorough wash too. I even kept a separate towel for her. Then I would send her up a water tank where she could dry off. Since her place was in my room under the bed, she had to be clean. I would spend maybe half an hour daily on her care. I gave her good bones to chew, because just rice and dal was not enough for a working dog. Our Muslim gardener procured them from outside. Sometimes I would order meat and he would bring dirty meat, often cheated by the shopkeepers. So I used to smell the

meat to make sure it was all right. That was when they thought things were going a bit too far and the swami in charge told me, 'No, you can't spend your time like that.' So we decided to put it to the vote. The majority felt that my time was valuable and I could not afford to spend so much time on a dog. I felt hurt, but reluctantly agreed, 'All right, it is a democracy. May the majority prevail.'

Next morning Swami Ajayanandaji got up earlier than usual and put Bhulu on a leash. Bhulu was good-natured and allowed any swami to handle her. Ajayanandaji took her to the railway station and boarded a train to Rishikesh, eighteen miles away. There he tied Bhulu to a post by the riverside. Handing out a rupee coin to a nearby shopkeeper he told him to release the dog sometime later. Then the swami spent the day with other swamis in Rishikesh and returned to the Sevashrama by

I told him to call Bhulu and see if she did not come. They all wondered what I was thinking. The cook called out and, presto, in raced Bhulu! Everybody jumped to his feet in disbelief. 'Did you really take her to Rishikesh in the first place?' they asked Ajayanandaji. Poor man, everybody doubted his authenticity now! 'Of course!' the swami protested. 'I even tied her up to a post. How could this have happened!' Then one of the monks broke in, 'Now the law is, when a man is sentenced to death by hanging, you can't hang him a second time if you failed to take his life the first time. So Bhulu is staying right here, there is no helping it.' Everybody agreed, 'Okay, Bhulu belongs here; we have no right to cast her out.' The next question was, who was going to take care of her? One brahmacharin stood up and said firmly, 'I will take care of Bhulu just as Narayan Maharaj instructs me. Let him not worry about it.' That was that. And the brahmacharin did look after Bhulu—with all love and care.

Bhulu's Demise

The story of Bhulu's death is as interesting as it is sad. A monkey bit her in the head. For a dog, a head wound means certain death, because it can't lick itself there. I used to put my

hand to Bhulu's lips to get the saliva and then rub it on the wound. But soon maggots formed and Bhulu began to howl and wail. We took her to the doctor, who suggested that we put her to sleep because she had developed rabies. The doctor even gave me some arsenic. Everybody said that since the doctor himself had advised it, we should get rid of Bhulu; we could not risk keeping a dangerous animal in the hospital with so many patients around. But nobody was willing to administer the poison. I had to do it myself: I gave it to her with bread. But she didn't die. Nobody was around when I gave the poisoned bread to Bhulu; so they thought I didn't do it. 'Honestly, I did

The cook called out and, presto, in raced Bhulu! Everybody jumped to his feet in disbelief. 'Did you really take her to Rishikesh in the first place?' they asked Ajayanandaji. Poor man, everybody doubted his authenticity now!

evening. Meanwhile, when I entered my room after vespers, I heard the sound of heavy breathing coming from under my bed. What was that! I roared with laughter. Putting my hand under the bed, I told Bhulu to be quiet. She remained there even after the dinner bell rang. I went to the dining hall alone and ate my meal. The cook had not known of our decision to get rid of Bhulu until after he had made rotis for her. He said to me with a sad face, 'I am sorry. I made rotis for Bhulu as usual, but they tell me she's gone forever.' 'Why don't you call her back?' I told him. 'But the dog is gone,' said Ajayanandaji triumphantly. 'Nobody is going to see her here again, don't you worry.' 'Oh really,' I said. Turning to the cook

give her the poison,' I said. 'Why should I lie when I know she is suffering.' Then the doctor gave me a bigger dose. All watched as I gave it to Bhulu, who ate it quietly. After some time she gave a slight jerk and lay still.

Bhulu got a monk's burial. We dug a big hole in a corner of the property, placed the body in it and covered it with earth. Ganges water was sprinkled and flower petals strewn on the spot, and the place became a sort of memorial. (Many years later, when I visited Kankhal in 1971, the Muslim gardener who knew the whole story told some of the swamis, 'Maharaj will certainly like to see that place.' So they had it cleaned up. Somebody had placed a flower on the spot. They told me that everybody at the Sevashrama knew Bhulu's story. They intended to preserve the place since the dog was so special to the Sevashrama.)

To Karachi with Swami Ranganathanandaji

By now I had spent nine years in Kankhal. I would have continued there, but in 1942 Swami Ranganathanandaji returned to Belur Math from Burma. He had walked the whole distance from Rangoon to Calcutta in the wake of the Burma evacuation. The Japanese were bombing Burma and people were fleeing to India. Most people were coming on foot—all could not get planes and boats. Ranganathanandaji was offered a boat and a plane, but he chose to be 'with the people'. On the journey there was no real food and he had to eat whatever came his way. By the time he

arrived at Belur Math his stomach was utterly ruined and he weighed a mere 35 kg! Everybody respected him and loved him because he was a good scholar and had been a fine speaker in Rangoon. His health was ravaged and so he was asked to go to Kankhal to recuperate. The authorities told him 'there is a nice brahmacharin there who will take good care of you.' Then they wrote me a letter saying, 'Take care of him; he is precious to us.' I went to the railway station to meet him. Ranganathanandaji was so thin that he could not even walk! We brought him to the Sevashrama in a horse carriage. I engaged a specialist to look after his health. We used to prepare for him very soft basmati rice mixed with cheese. In four months he was fit enough to play volleyball with us.

When Ranganathanandaji had regained his health, Belur Math wanted him to take charge of Karachi centre. He agreed on the condition that I accompanied him. But headquarters could not release me from Kankhal right away. 'Take your time,' Ranganathanandaji said. 'I will go to Karachi now, but keep in mind that you will have to send him to me as soon as possible.' In August 1942 he left Kankhal and I joined him in December 1943. I did not like to go away from Kankhal, but I also wanted to be with Ranganathanandaji. He is such a wonderful man! I used to spend long hours with him. He is not only a scholar, but a good monk. Really, we both were so close. I left Kankhal only for his sake and when I reached Karachi he was so happy. *

True Worship

This is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 3.141-2

Two Weeks in South Africa

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

In response to an invitation from Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban, to participate in their diamond jubilee celebrations, on 1 May 2002 I took the South African Airways flight to Johannesburg from Mauritius, where I had spent six enjoyable days on the first leg of my tour. I left Mauritius at 4:20 pm (local time) arriving in Johannesburg at 6:50 pm (South African time), a four-and-a-half-hour flight. There was another South African Airways flight at 8:30 pm, by which I left for Durban, the capital of Kwa-Zulu Natal, landing there at 9:40 pm.

South Africa—A Brief History

Before I describe my visit, a brief survey of the history of South Africa will be in order. The southern and central parts of Africa in particular remained unknown and unexplored until the fifteenth century. The Europeans—the Dutch, the Germans and later the British—were intent on finding a sea route to India. It is good to remember that Columbus started his famous voyage to find a route to India and landed in the Western hemisphere! In the latter part of the fifteenth century the Portuguese tried to find a sea route to India, circumnavigating the Cape, the southernmost tip of the African continent. Vasco da Gama sailed along the east coast of Africa, before heading for India. They journeyed inland in search of gold, and slaves for their labour force.

The Dutch followed the Portuguese and gradually established themselves in the southern part of the continent. The next few centuries saw a continual struggle between the black natives and the white foreigners and sometimes among the European colonialists

themselves. By the nineteenth century the British were in the subcontinent in full measure. Firearms played a significant role in capturing slaves and territory. Then broke out the fight for superiority among the white settlers—Dutch, German and British. This struggle resulted in the destructive Anglo-Boer war between the Afrikaners' South African Republic (which included Dutch and other European settlers) with the British at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thousands died on both sides. We may recall that Mahatma Gandhi, then a practising lawyer in Durban, organized an ambulance corps for British soldiers injured in this war.

Having conquered southern Africa, the British organized themselves into the colonies of Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State and the Cape. Only white males were given citizenship; the female population, the blacks, and the coloured (including Indians) were non-citizens. Though slavery had ceased to exist by now, the coloured population was reduced to the status of labourers with practically no rights.

During 1906-13, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi the Indian community in South Africa began demanding democratic rights for the coloured people. After Gandhiji left for India, they weakened but the struggle continued. The South African Republic formed in 1961 set in motion its policy of the obnoxious apartheid, segregating the rest of the population from the whites. Till 1994, when this policy was withdrawn, the Indian Government had no diplomatic relations with South Africa; nor could Indians travel to that country.

When the blacks came to power in 1994

with Nelson Mandela as President, India established diplomatic relations with the republic, as a result of which there has been a free movement of Indians to South Africa and vice versa.

The Present Scenario

South Africa has around 44 million people. The official languages are Afrikaans (a mixture of Dutch and German) and English. Besides these, all the nine provinces have their own languages or dialects. The black majority forms nearly 85% of the population; the rest are whites and Indians.

South Africa could be counted as a developed country despite widespread poverty among the blacks. Well-paved roads criss-cross the country. South Africa is the biggest gold- and diamond-producing country in the world, about 47% of the world's gold coming from there. The country is also rich in other minerals. Sugar cane is a major agricultural product. All these resources have made the South African economy quite sound.

Almost all the houses and buildings in Durban and Johannesburg have a notice: 'Burglar Alarm—Armed Response'. I learnt that burglary and crime are rampant there, and private firms handle the security of the houses entrusting themselves to their care.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa

was founded in 1942 by Swami Nishchalananda, a South African citizen, known as Dhango-pal Naidu in pre-monastic life. Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's message of 'renunciation and service', he wrote to Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order, with a view to embracing monastic life. The venerable swami encouraged the young man in his spiritual quest.



Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban

Naidu went to India and lived in Belur Math as a monastic novice. Swami Virajanandaji initiated him in 1949. The young man was keen to work in South Africa, where the Ramakrishna Mission was not in a position to start a centre. So he went to the Himalayas, received monastic vows from Swami Purushottamanandaji of Vasishtha Guha, a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, and became Swami Nishchalananda. Then he returned to South Africa in 1953 with his guru's blessings and encouragement.

With Swami Nishchalananda's arrival, the activities of the Ramakrishna Centre started expanding. Through prayer services, lectures, retreats and seminars in different parts of South Africa, he spread the message of

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. He organized relief operations in times of need and also pioneered service activities among the black community.

His sudden death in 1965 at a young age of 40 cast a pall of gloom over the devotees, but fortunately Swami Shivapadananda, his only sannyasin disciple, took over from where he left. Till his passing away in 1994, Swami Shivapadananda intensified and expanded the work. The different sub-centres in Natal province came to be closely linked. With the consolidation of the work the Centre became a well-known socio-religious organization in the region.

His disciple Swami Saradananda now heads the Centre, which has eminent citizens of Durban as members of its Board of Management. In 1994, when a democratic government came into being with voting rights for all citizens irrespective of colour or creed, the Centre began to win appreciation among liberal-minded citizens. Its contact with India and the Ramakrishna Mission intensified, bringing it closer to the mainstream of the Ramakrishna Movement. One can now boldly say that the Movement is now thriving and has a bright future in South Africa.

My Visit

As I said at the beginning of this article, I left Mauritius for South Africa on 1 May 2002 to participate in the diamond jubilee celebrations of the Ramakrishna Centre. Reaching Johannesburg at 6:30 pm, I had to check in again before flying to Durban, the capital of Kwa-Zulu province, where the Ramakrishna Centre is located. The flight left Johannesburg at 8:30 pm and landed in Durban at 9:40 pm. Swami Saradananda and some devotees met me at the airport. About an hour's drive brought us to the ashrama.

Next morning, 2 May, was bright and pleasant. Situated on a nine-acre plot of land—originally it was fourteen acres, but the Government took away five acres to lay a road—the ashrama has a beautiful landscape with its undulating land presenting a pleasant view. It has a big temple with an image of Sri Ramakrishna and photographs of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. The prayer hall can accommodate about 400 devotees. It is interesting to note that devotee-volunteers manage all the ashrama work. Among them are some highly qualified doctors who periodically visit the state-run Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital and give free consultation

and check up for poor patients. This is a significant service considering expensive medical care and the dearth of doctors.

In the afternoon there was a children's event with more than 400 participants. The programme included bhajans and group singing. I spoke to the children for twenty minutes. After arati the children formed long lines to offer pranams to the visiting swami. They had brought chocolates and fruits as offerings, which accumulated into a big heap. When



Author addressing the audience

asked what would be done with all that, Swami Saradananda replied that they would be distributed to black children in a nearby orphanage and to patients in the hospital. That was a good idea.

I was free all next day, 3 May. Dr Anup Seebrun accompanied me in my early morning walk in the ashrama campus and we discussed some religious and philosophical matters. At 9:30 am Dr Anup and Dr Prabhu took me round Durban and its outskirts. Durban is the third biggest city in South Africa, known for its large ethnic Indian population. This most important seaport in the country is quite hilly. Houses dot mountain slopes in many places. The whites captured the best sites. The Indians are separately housed. The blacks got the worst sites.

In the evening there was a dinner with leaders of different religions: Sister Agnes of Marine Hill Convent, Maulana Rafeek Shah and others. The maulana was quite liberal and jolly. Sister Agnes earnestly invited me to visit their convent, which I did on the 7th.

The Diamond Jubilee Celebrations

On 4 May I gave a TV interview in which I answered questions about the ideals and activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and followed it up with a brief talk on the subject of devotion.

In the afternoon, the inaugural function of the diamond jubilee celebrations of Ramakrishna Centre was to be held at a hired hall in Phoenix, a settlement in the outskirts of Durban. We reached the venue at 3:45 pm. By 4:00

it was filled to its capacity of 1500. Though the audience mainly consisted of ethnic Indians, there were also around 200 blacks and some whites. Many important dignitaries were also present: members of the national and provincial parliaments, judges of the Natal high court, members of the consular group, commanding officers of the armed forces, Mr S S Mukherjee, High Commissioner of India in South Africa, Mr Ajit Kumar, Consul General of India, and quite a few religious leaders. I



Audience at the diamond jubilee function

spoke for about 25 minutes on 'The Ramakrishna Movement—Its Aims and Objectives in the Modern World', stressing harmony of religions and service to people. The cultural programme that followed had a song-and-dance performance by the black children of the Sisulwazi Primary School. It reminded me of the tribal dances of central India. The programme was followed by dinner in which all the invitees and members of the audience joined. Everything had been systematically organized and the function was a success.

On 5 May Swami Saradananda took me to Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama, a women's centre, 20 to 30 km from the main ashrama. The

centre was opened in 1984 and is now managed by Pravrajika Ishtaprana and two aged ladies. It is of modest size and housed in a beautiful building. The shrine-cum-auditorium is tastefully designed. A beautiful marble image of Sri Ramakrishna and photographs of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda adorn the altar. A satsang was arranged in the hall, which was packed with about 450

bhajans beautifully. We returned to the ashrama by 8:45 pm. After supper and a brief stroll, I retired for the day.

On 7 May, we visited the convent at Mariana Hill, in response to Sister Agnes' invitation. She was of German origin. The convent is a big complex with fine buildings commanding a marvellous view. Four or five more nuns joined us in a discussion over a cup of coffee. They were deeply interested in Hinduism and things Indian. I spent quite some time answering their questions.

From there we went to the Phoenix settlement, where Mahatma Gandhi had lived for 21 years from 1904. In 1985 the settlement was destroyed by apartheid violence, but in 1990 it was rebuilt. There was a printing press where the journal *Indian Opinion* (later *The Opinion*) was printed. Now the place is maintained as a national memorial.

In the afternoon we left for Pietermaritzburg, a fairly big city nearly 100 km away. Its streets and buildings are in the British colonial style. However, the Indian area looked different. The roads have Indian names: Bombay Road, Nagpur Road, India Street, and so on. The local Ramakrishna centre is on Sarojini Street. It is managed by two devotees, Mr Sunil and Ms Avita. Though not very big, the centre has enough space for two or three monks, besides a well-decorated shrine. The prayer hall can hold about 200 persons. I spoke there on 'Devotional Practices according to the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*'.

After dinner Mr Ramesh Ishvarlal, a devotee, took Dr Gour Das and me to his house at Drakensburg North, a mountain resort 150 km



Sisulwazi primary school children's event

people. I spoke on the 'Role and Responsibilities of Women Devotees in the Ramakrishna-Sarada Movement'. Dr Gour Das had arrived from India by now. We all had lunch and returned to the ashrama.

Next morning I had to visit the Department of Home Affairs with Dr Prabhu to get my visa extended up to 18 June. Inadvertently it had been issued only until 7 June. That could have meant a lot of trouble. Dr Prabhu knew the people in the department and that made the job easy.

In the evening we went to Phoenix, where about 200 devotees had gathered in a temple. I spoke to them for about 40 minutes on 'Spiritualizing Domestic Life'. The devotees sang the arati song and many other

away. We reached there at night. It is a beautiful house in the vicinity of Giant's Castle, a massive peak of solid black rock situated at a height of 3300 m above sea level. Perhaps in mid-winter it gets covered with snow.

It was quite chilly at night. We woke up next morning to a bright sunshine and heavy frost outside. We did a little trekking, a short climb up the hill. Mrs Ishvarlal and Mrs Seebrun served us a nice breakfast. Around 9 am we left for Pietermaritzburg and from there for Durban. It was at Pietermaritzburg railway station that Gandhiji started his satyagraha after being made to detrain in spite of holding a valid first class ticket. We went to the station platform and saw the plaque commemorating the event.

Later in the day Dr Seebrun took us to a bookshop, but I did not find books of my interest. In the evening we left for the Chatsworth ashrama, a branch of the Durban centre. I spoke to some 100 devotees there on 'The Practical Application of Vedanta for the Service of Disadvantaged Communities'. After a light supper, we returned to the Ramakrishna Centre at 9:15 pm.

On 9 May, Swami Saradananda took us to the Divine Life Society's ashrama on an invitation from its head Swami Sahajanandaji. The ashrama is on a five-acre area, dotted with several buildings. The Society has a modern printing press with which it publishes many religious books. There is an indoor pond where fresh water is made holy with Ganga water. Sahajanandaji gave us some Ganga water to pour into the pond.

Some dignitaries joined us for dinner that

evening: some important doctors, Mrs Rabia, an attorney at law, and Mr Kamal Pandey, a member of parliament. In his animated discussion Mr Pandey felt that Indians should identify themselves with the black majority.

On the 10th morning, we visited Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital. As I mentioned before, some of our devotee doctors give free consultancy services there. It is a well-planned hospital with 400 beds and kept spotlessly clean, quite unlike government-run hospitals in India! From there we went to Verlam Care Centre, an old age home run by people of Indian origin. I spoke to some inmates and found them happy; the centre was taking good care of them. From here we went to the Osindweni hospital to see their paediatric section. Here again our devotee doctors



Talking to devotees in the Centre's prayer hall

render free service.

In the afternoon we had an outing by the seaside. The seashore is craggy, but there are nice lonely corners to spend a quiet time. The ocean is not very rough here. We spent the evening meeting the office-bearers and members of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and the heads and administrators of its branches. I spoke to them about the principles

governing the Ramakrishna Movement and its administrative set-up.

The following day we visited a residential orphanage school, which has about 50 black children. I distributed to them chocolates and some food items, and spoke to them for a few minutes. It was translated into Zulu. The Ramakrishna Centre supplies them with various things from time to time. The Centre



With representatives of different religions

had thoroughly renovated the school's dilapidated building—an act of laudable service to these neglected black children.

We had satsang that afternoon. There were some 250 devotees, most of them quite young. I spoke to them for about 50 minutes on the 'Message of the *Bhagavadgita*'.

At 6:30 in the evening Saradananda, Dr Gour Das and I left for Pietermaritzburg with Dr Jogeswar, an eminent doctor. At Pietermaritzburg I met the devotees, after which we had our supper and retired.

On 12 May, early morning, we left for Mr Kirti's house in Lady Smith, two hours away, where we had breakfast. Soon after that we visited the local Ramakrishna centre, which has a nice prayer hall. From there we went to

the big rented hall where the North Natal convention had been arranged to commemorate the diamond jubilee of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. This was a formal conference attended by important people—about 250 of them. Mr Kamal Pandey inaugurated the convention and I spoke on 'Ramakrishna Movement's Contribution to Cultural Transformation'. The other speakers were Pravrajika Ishtaprana, Ms Barbara Masse and Mr Dilip Hansji.

After lunch and a short rest at Mr Kirti's house, we left for Dundee and from there for New Castle, which has a branch of the Ramakrishna Centre. The night was pretty cold. Mr Prabhu, father of Dr Prabhu of Durban, is from this place. Next morning he remarked that the minimum temperature the previous night was minus 2°C!

On the 13th morning the sunshine was very pleasant. We started for Mr Kirti's house at 7 am and reached there an hour later. We left their place at 9 after breakfast and were back in Durban by 11:30.

Now we had to get ready to leave for Johannesburg the next day. In the evening I met some devotees.

Johannesburg

Swami Saradananda, Dr Gour Das and I left for the airport early in the morning. We reached Johannesburg at 9:20 am. Mr Harshad Master and his son Manoj met us at the airport and Mr Harshad drove us to his house in Lenasia, where most Johannesburg Indians live.

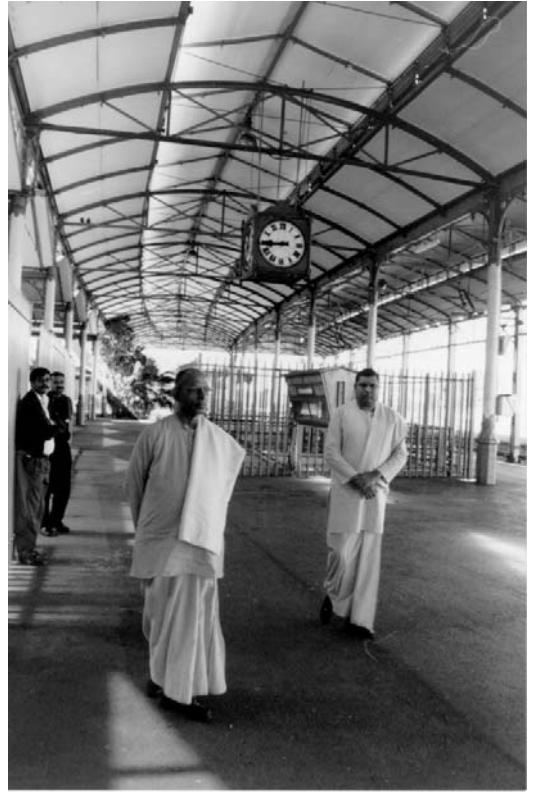
After tea and snacks, we left for Lion's

Park, a 45-minute drive from the house. For a change, the lions were roaming about freely and we were in the cage—our vehicle! These African lions are bigger and obviously more powerful than their Indian counterparts in Gir. A separate enclosure had four- or five-month-old cubs. Visitors can briefly enter the enclosure and even fondle the cubs! Some of them pose for photographs holding the cubs.

In the afternoon we went for a walk and at 6 pm visited the Vishnu temple. The altar accommodated almost all gods and goddesses! Some bhajans were being sung, but they sounded too modern. I spoke there for 15 minutes. From there we went to Mr Arvindbhai's house for dinner. He happens to be Dr Prabhu's brother-in-law.

Next day, 15 May, after breakfast we went for a walk and paid a visit to the Rameshwaram temple, a beautifully built structure. In the afternoon, I gave a *Gita* class to Saradananda, Mr Harshadbhai and two or three more friends. After the evening walk, we visited another temple where I spoke on the 'Message of the *Bhagavadgita*'.

I was scheduled to fly out of Johannesburg on 16 May. Though the flight was at 10:20 am we had to start as early as 6:15 because of the heavy early morning traffic. Swami Saradananda and Mr Arvindbhai left earlier. Mr Harshadbhai saw me off at the airport.



With Swami Saradananda at P'burg station

It was a nine-and-a-half-hour long, tedious flight to Sao Paulo in South America. Of which later. *

Catch Yourself

A child was continuously crying one evening. His parents were concerned. They tried all sorts of medicines, candies, toys, but to no avail. Many holy men came, chanted incantations and sprinkled holy water on him. The child did not stop crying. Finally, there came a practical yogi. He understood the problem: the child was trying to catch his shadow's tuft of hair. When he moved towards the shadow, the shadow moved away from him. That was what made him cry. The clever yogi made the child catch his own tuft. Now the child burst into laughter, because he saw the shadow also catching its tuft. All were happy.

There is no use running after shadows. That will only bring misery. It is rather better to catch one's own Self. That will automatically catch the shadow also. If the cause is taken care of, the effect will take care of itself.

Half a Decade in the Enchanting Environs of Along

SWAMI KIRTIDANANDA

Part 2: The Curtain-raiser

Education of the Educated: The Teacher Taught

To go back to the beginning. All land in the mountain regions of the Himalayas in India belongs by tradition to the people of the locality, and no person or institution from outside the state can own or possess any portion of it by purchase or deed of gift. However, after due deliberation and in spite of their initial reluctance and hesitation, the local tribal people agreed to gift a patch of their unused land on the outskirts of Along town, three kilometres away, for Mission work. That land is the present playground, and some uneven hill tract above. Seeing it now, no one can imagine its past condition. It was marshy ground, covered over with thorny shrubs and bushes, and thick prickly grass, three or four feet high. The tribals gave the swami a *dao*, the local version of a sickle, to clear the jungle and do what he thought best to do with it. The local people, even small children, use this instrument quite dexterously and with ease, as much to sacrifice a large animal like the *mithun*, their sacred property, as to farm the land for *jhum* cultivation or to create a thing of beauty out of bamboo, producing as if by magic attractive floral designs for decoration.

English-medium Primary School— Starting from Scratch

Town-bred as he was, and totally unaccustomed to the kind of toil he was entrusted with, the swami was uncomfortable in using the instrument. But he would not give up. He

would somehow juggle with it awkwardly for hours, to the great amusement of the onlookers and suppressed shrieks of their laughter. Thus, after days of hard struggle and the effort of a fortnight or even a month, he succeeded in clearing a portion of the land, single-handed, with the local people watching curiously from a distance—a job that their children would have finished in hours. Seeing the swami's determination, they gradually volunteered, one by one, to assist him. With their help, the whole place was soon ready for putting up some bamboo structures to house an assembly hall, a dormitory for boys, a school building, and another for the swami to stay in, in their ancient style of construction with raised platforms. Once the people's confidence had been gained, everything moved fast. Amidst much flutter and great fanfare an English-medium primary school was started—with about a hundred boys and girls on the rolls, and about fifty boys in the hostel. In no time it became the talk of the town. The swami was in high spirits at the success that had attended his untiring efforts and the popularity he had gained in a short time. That is when the blow struck, and I arrived on the scene.

Forewarned is Forearmed

Public applause is, indeed, a heady wine, and tribal work is stronger stuff, highly intoxicating. Extreme caution and discrimination are required to restrain one from falling prey

to its effects or to escape from its clutches. As Verrier Elwin, whom I have quoted earlier, has rightly pointed out,

Tribal work is very exciting and exhilarating to begin with because of the immediate success one meets with in the early stages and the high hopes it engenders in one. One may plunge oneself headlong into it recklessly, regardless of the consequences, only to realize soon that things are not what they seem to be. Then he could be in for disappointment, and the resulting frustration may be his undoing. There is always the danger of overdoing things and overworking out of initial enthusiasm.

That is what happened to the swami, resulting in his having a paralytic attack. Mentally, too, he was under great stress, as one of his close associates revealed to me. Because of his extreme identification with the work, which was a bit wide off the mark for a monk, the gentleman told me, they had begun to feel he was bound to break down sooner or later under its pressure. The swami himself, while he was convalescing at our hospital in Calcutta (now Kolkata), where I had gone to get briefed about the work at Along on instructions from our headquarters, told me: 'I had become something like the Phizo in Nagaland. You cannot! 'Thank God I cannot!' I thought to myself. However the swami's words were a good pointer to me to be on my guard. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Involvement with local politics is indeed ridden with dangerous portents. Better steer clear of it.

Yet, I cannot say with any degree of assurance that I too did not get dragged into the

net or fall into the trap altogether. The very nature of the work itself was such at that point of time. In the prevailing conditions—as perhaps is true even today—it was inevitable that we should at least take a lively interest in the political happenings in the area, even if we did not actively participate in them. We could not have completely insulated ourselves from them. Even if we had succeeded in that, we could not have escaped its impact on our work. As I said at the very outset, the source and origin of our work lay in the Chinese invasion of India and its aftermath. We were caught up in the current of events and swept off our feet, in spite of ourselves. We were inebriated on the one hand by the very nature of



Boys welcoming Mr Y B Chavan, Mr B K Nehru and Swami Gambhiranandaji for the school building inauguration

the work and on the other by the programme of action charted out for us by Swami Vivekananda himself. The mood of the moment at the time is best revealed by the following incident that took place during my tenure as the head of the institution.

Almost Cornered by the Boys

It was the last period of the day in the school timetable, more a time for relaxation af-

ter a strenuous working session right from morning than of any serious business. Generally, it was devoted to some light reading according to one's choice, maybe a storybook or a comic. Or the time may be spent working in the garden or learning dance or music. Of course, there would be some teacher to supervise for name's sake. That day I happened to be in the library doing the nominal supervision work. The students were all young chil-

'No'. The next question: 'Do you believe He exists?' 'Yes', I said casually, totally unsuspecting. It never occurred to me then that they had a definite purpose in asking these questions. They were just leading questions to a point they had in mind. 'How so, when you have not seen Him yourself?'—the next well-timed question was hurled at me. I replied perfunctorily, unmindful of what they were going to say next: 'Why? There are others, say



Swami Gambhiranandaji speaking on the occasion

Ramakrishna or Vivekananda in our own times, not to speak of other saints of the past and the present, who *have seen*, and I believe their words.' 'How could you when you are not a direct witness to what they say?' I gave the usual reply: 'Why not? You do not see stars on certain nights or during daytime, and yet take it for granted that they do exist all the same, believing in the words of your teacher or science books. Or that hydrogen and oxygen, two gases, combined in a certain proportion, pro-

dren belonging to standard IV or V. They were that day in no mood to read even a storybook, and saw that I was also in a jovial mood and not inclined to force them to do something against their will. Led by their leader, one Dege Ete—himself a teacher when I last heard about him—they tried to engage me in a friendly conversation. Finding me quite willing to join them in the light-hearted banter and raillery, they started exchanging pleasantries with me freely. Then, suddenly, what had started as a quiet chit-chat turned into a serious discussion on God and a life of prayer. They asked me: 'Have you seen God, Swamiji?' Not knowing their intention or what they were driving at, I frankly told the truth:

duce water, a liquid, which is on the face of it very absurd. Your authority, again, is your teachers or your science books! Isn't it so?' 'No, that is different. We know people in the other hemisphere are able to see the stars at the same time, and we can also go there and see for ourselves if we want to. As for the water phenomenon, we can experiment in the laboratory to find out the truth.' 'So is the case here', I said. 'You can experiment for yourself and find out whether God exists or not.' 'What experiments?' 'Say, for example, doing prayers.' They jumped with joy at my reply, and pounced upon me like so many tigers. It was just what they were eagerly waiting for. They were ready with their next question:

'Don't you see that it is not true? See, you are forcing us to go to prayers both morning and evening, and we are doing so regularly, very punctually. Yet, we haven't seen Him!' The implication being: what need of these prayers, which we monks considered sacrosanct and always insisted upon their attending without fail, but which they, as much as the children elsewhere in every other hostel, disliked from the bottom of their hearts?

'Where?' I said, 'Are you praying so that you may see God? You are praying so that you may pass your examinations, so that you may become big officers or doctors or engineers, aren't you? And is not this wish of yours being fulfilled? Are you not getting a well-rounded education to prepare you for achieving your wished-for ends in life?' They acquiesced—they *had* to—though grudgingly, but countered with the question: 'Well! Accepted we are praying for these things. What about you? You are surely not praying for these things, and yet you say you have not seen Him!' I was in a tricky situation. I was perplexed. If I said I too prayed for these things, then they would say: 'What kind of a monk are you? Praying for worldly things just like us!' If I said, no, I am praying for the vision of God, then they would catch me by the scruff of my neck and say: 'See, what we are saying is correct—prayers are useless, as you yourself say that you haven't seen Him even after so many years of praying!' I was easily trounced. Somehow, the words came out of my mouth: 'I, too! Where am I praying for the vision of God? Right at the moment I am only praying for *your* welfare and the welfare of the people of

Arunachal; praying so that you may all, the tribal boys of this place, get a good education and prosper, and later on come to occupy important positions of power in the country; so that this school of yours may grow into a premier institution of learning and education in the country, not only in Arunachal; so that God may be pleased to grant this wish of



Mr Y B Chavan speaking on the occasion

mine! Is not that prayer of mine being fulfilled? You yourselves have seen what this institution was in the beginning and how it has grown by leaps and bounds within the matter of a few years, and how you yourselves have grown.' Of course, they could not deny this or object to this reply of mine. They became silent, and left the scene quietly one by one.

Indescribable Yearning

I had uttered these words on the spur of the moment. Rather, these words had slipped out of my mouth unconsciously, just to get out of an awkward situation they had drawn me into or which I myself got into. I had given no serious thought to them. Yet, that was the truth, pure and simple. Those days we were consumed with an inexplicable passion for the improvement of the school and the prosperity

Recd 11/12/69
11.12.69
my dear Kirti Daman,
We reached Shillong last night at about 9 p.m. The plane did not go to Tuzoore also saved some time as Jorhat, so that instead of being 2 1/2 hrs late, we were late by 1 1/2 hrs. Myajwanda and Parbatpati (N. Gachhat) were at the airport, and as were some friends. We are all right here. Your journey back must have been a difficult one at night with no very many subways.
My love to both yourself and Samant as also to the children.
Shillong is a wonderful place - calm, beautiful and full of people with sincerity and eagerness for progress. It is an exhilarating experience to be engaged in their service. But, as you are fully aware, work in primitive societies is full of risk. A little thing may slowly pull one down unless one is extremely

about the future development of Shillong we shall we wait and expectantly to hear more and move. But please see that we are not pushed too far beyond our depth by the enthusiasm of the people and the dynamic pull of the Administration.
My Homarkas to the D. G. or better, Mr. Norman, Mr. T. Chappin, the Secretary, M. P. (D. S.) and the D. R. and all others who have been so kind all along.
Yours affly
Gambhiranandaji

Facsimile of Swami Gambhiranandaji's letter

and welfare of the children studying in it. There was no other thought in our minds besides these. Now, when I look back upon it, it all appears as if some sort of madness had gripped our minds, some kind of obsession, and the soul was aflame with an indescribable yearning or desire to realize it in the shortest possible time. We ate with that thought, slept with that thought, walked in its rhythm, to use an expression of Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn).

The Real Propelling Force

Undoubtedly, Swami Vivekananda's words were the real propelling force. None could remain unmoved by his electrifying words. They perforce roused one to intense activity. But they would have meant nothing

in the circumstances in which we were working if it wasn't for the ready response you received from the children themselves, on the one hand, and the people, on the other. The children were keen to learn, and you were encouraged by their sharpness, intelligence, and willingness to work hard and do your bidding to improve them. The cooperation of a good many parents and guardians who gave us a free hand to mould the children as best we could, was a significant factor in enthusing us.

The General Secretary's Visit

The first occasion I experienced this was when we had the inaugural function of the school and the hostel in their new premises on 6 December 1969, just three months after my arrival at Along. It was a historic moment in

the annals of the Along school. The importance of the day was heightened by the presence of no less a personality than the then General Secretary (later President) of the Mission, Revered Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, who was so overwhelmed by the events of the day, that he dashed off the following letter immediately to me and followed it up with a lengthy article in the July 1970 issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, where he most graphically recorded his impressions of the work done till then and its implications for the future. I can do no better than quote him in full. For it is a document precious in more ways than one.

11.12.69

Shillong

My dear Kirtidananda,

We reached Shillong last night at about 9 pm. The plane did not go to Tejpur and saved some time at Jorhat, so that instead of 2½ hours late, we were late by 1½ hours. Abjakananda and Pashupathi (of Gauhati) were at the airport, and so were some friends. We are all right here. Your journey back must have been a difficult one at night with so many subways.

My love to both yourself and Samaresh as also to the children.

Along is a wonderful place—calm, beautiful and full of people with sincerity and eagerness for progress. It is an exhilarating experience to be engaged in their service. But, as you are fully aware, work in primitive societies is full of risk. Little Along may slowly pull one down unless one is extremely vigilant.

About the future development we shall wait expectantly to hear more and more. But please see that we are not pushed too far beyond our depth by enthusiasm of the people and the dynamic pull of the administration.

My Namaskars to Mr Dey, Mr Dutta, Mr Boken Ete, Mr Tapang Taki, the Education Officer (DIS) and DRO and all others who have been so kind all along.

Yours affectionately,
Gambhirananda

And in the article entitled 'Ramakrishna Mission among the Tribals', while speaking of

the Along work, he says:

Our late respected Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked that the Ramakrishna Mission works silently without advertisement and fanfaronade. Panditji appreciated this quiet efficiency; and the Mission, administered by unassuming monks, also would like to avoid public glare. But in these days of publicity, people want to know what a particular organization does with the money it gets. If publicity is neglected, it may often enough lead to the unwarranted conclusion that the organization is doing nothing, and to that extent its public support may dwindle. So to be effective in the field of charitable and philanthropic service in modern days, an organization must willy-nilly give a public account of its activity.

A concrete example will bring home to many the truth of these remarks. The uninformed belief in some quarters is that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission work only in urban areas and there too among the middle classes alone. This is altogether a wrong impression. But we do not propose to deal here with this criticism as a whole; we shall rather confine our attention to the particular aspect of it, in so far as it relates to the work of the Math and Mission among and for the tribals.

Just a few months back, in December 1969, the writer had an opportunity to visit Along, the headquarters of Siang division of NEFA, almost at the junction of India, Burma, and China. A few miles east of Along flow, down a deep gorge, the emerald waters of the mighty and the holy river Brahmaputra, locally known as Siang. The division derives its name from this river, as other divisions in NEFA also derive theirs from other rivers running through them or washing their boundaries—Kameng, Subansiri, Lohit and Tirap. Along lies deep in the bosom of the eastern Himalayas, about 150 kilometres from Shilapathar, the nearest railway station on the NF Railway with which a good motorable hill road connects the tiny township. A hundred kilometres east of Shilapathar is Lilabari (North Lakhimpur), the airport, from where runs a fine road parallel to the north bank of the Brahmaputra right up to the foothills at Likabali. These hills once had close cultural links with the plains, as is evidenced by a broken temple on a hill near Likabali. The scat-

tered stone pieces with beautiful sculpture bear witness to the magnificence of the structure, which once enshrined the image of Goddess Durga, still having intact her body with ten hands, though the head is smashed. She is known locally as Malini. That contact was lost for many decades, and during the British regime, the people of the plains had no access to the hills. The tribals led their isolated life following a set cultural pattern woven round their gods—the sun and moon. Indians and English were equally foreigners in their eyes, and they shunned both. Things have however changed for the better in the sixties of the present century, particularly after the Chinese invasion. Progress is writ large everywhere and the Government is spending immensely to accelerate this and win over the tribals to the cause of modern civilization. In the improvement of their relations with the world outside, the Ramakrishna Mission has contributed not a little.

The Ramakrishna Mission started work near Along township in 1966, with a residential primary school for tribal boys and girls, all of whom lived on the school campus in thatched houses built with bamboo and other local materials. The school building too was of the same pattern. The tribals wanted to learn English, and this was the only school in the area which promised them greater contact with the wide world through an international medium. The tribals were eager for knowledge and self-expression and their children were highly intelligent. They came from far-off villages, for NEFA is very thinly populated, with only four inhabitants per square mile. The school had therefore to be a residential one. This provided an opportunity for the Mission to come in intimate touch with the tribals and identify itself with their aspirations. They, for their part, accepted the Mission heartily, provided as much land as the Mission wanted, built cottages for the school and accommodation for their children as a labour of love, and cooperated in the project in every other way. The monks of the Mission too worked with them shoulder to shoulder and thus won their love. The Government of India helped the Mission unstintingly with money and other services. And thus came a glorious

day in the history of Along when on 6 December 1969, Mr Y B Chavan, Home Minister of India, inaugurated the new school and hostel buildings constructed at the cost of about Rs 14,00,000.

That day the whole place assumed a gala atmosphere. The tribals had worked day and night to decorate the place with gates, arches, flags, festoons and rostrum for a meeting—all in the tribal fashion with bamboo and straw. The occasion was thought sufficiently important for the Home Minister to fly all the way from distant Delhi, and with him came Governor B K Nehru from Shillong along with many officials of the NEFA administration. The General Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission presided. The Governor, as the chief guest, spoke first; then the Home Minister made a fine speech. Some tribal leaders also spoke in Hindi. Last the General Secretary spoke of the ideas and ideals which the Ramakrishna Mission was seeking to work out among the tribals.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, according to the General Secretary, had raised the dignity of men by discovering their potential divinity and had called upon their followers to worship that divinity for the sake of their own spiritual uplift. Swami Vivekananda, again, asked all not only to tolerate but also to accept and honour other points of view and other cultures. The Mission therefore approaches the tribals in a spirit of worshipful service, not criticizing them in any way, but rather encouraging them to develop according to their own genius. Their cultural traits are loved and preserved and their God is worshipped with full reverence. The Mission also brings knowledge from outside. Through the Mission they learn of the cultures of the people of the plains. They are left free to evaluate them, and to adopt and absorb as much as they will.

The Mission's work has succeeded and the tribals are now very eager to see this work spread in other parts of NEFA. The NEFA administration is equally enthusiastic and, as a result, the Mission has been almost forced, in spite of its extreme dearth of monastic manpower, to take steps to start another such centre next year in Tirap, the easternmost division of NEFA.

(to be continued)

The First Hundred Years of the Immortal Gospel

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

In the Vedanta Movement—also popularly known in India as the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement—*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* occupies centre stage. In fact, both inside and outside the Movement many tributes have been showered on it over the years. For example, someone used the term ‘steno-graphic exactitude’ to describe its faithfulness. Another described it as ‘the historical record of a saint’. Aldous Huxley observed: ‘Never have the small events of a contemplative’s daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.’ Thus the *Gospel* is a well-documented, unique record of the life and teachings of an Incarnation of God.

Those who regularly read the *Bhagavad-gita* know that there is a hymn on the glory of this work, which contains a beautiful expression: ‘*Gītāśraye’ham tiṣṭhāmi, gītā me cottamam grham*. I live taking shelter in the *Gita*; the *Gita* is my home supreme.’ Likewise, the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna is everywhere, but it specially pervades his *Gospel*. Though many people are now familiar with this great work, there are some important and interesting points concerning it which are perhaps not so well known.

Popularity of Bengali Editions

The Bengali edition of the *Gospel* is very popular in India. The first volume of this five-volume work was published in 1902 on Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday, which makes this year the centenary of its publication. But before the *Gospel* was published in book form it was serialized in a number of journals. Inter-

estingly, the articles became so popular that they were published in as many as seventeen journals in and around Calcutta (now Kolkata). Sometimes the same article was published in four journals simultaneously. Again, some journals reprinted those articles. This is something unusual in Bengal. Then on 1 January 1983, the day after the copyright expired, at least six publishers came out with their own editions of the Bengali *Gospel*. But then again there was something unusual: the demand for the book was phenomenal; there were such long queues of people outside bookshops that for crowd control the police had to resort to a mild lathi charge. *Anandabazar Patrika*, the most popular Bengali newspaper, had an impressive headline that read in translation, ‘With the expiry of the copyright, the *Gospel* is spreading fast like flood.’ That is some indication of the popularity of the work.

In the original Bengali the work is called *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. Earlier, however, Mahendranath Gupta—or M—the recorder of the work, had chosen the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita*. This title was used at least in one Bengali journal. Thereafter M changed it to *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. Most likely he was inspired by a verse from the *Srimad Bhagavata*: ‘The nectar of thy words revives the spirit of those scorched by the world. Thy words purify the sinner and are the very life of the holy. Just hearing them is auspicious and brings peace. Those who spread thy name far and wide are the real givers of wealth.’¹ This verse clearly brings out the objective of Mahendranath Gupta’s work. But before this he himself had used the term ‘gospel’ when referring to the English version of this work. In fact, he first started writing it in

English, and some of the articles he then wrote were entitled 'Leaves from the Pages of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. In place of the author's name he wrote something very interesting: 'According to M, a Son of the Lord and Disciple'.

Uniqueness of the *Gospel*

The word 'gospel' has two meanings: message as well as story. In the Bible there is the Gospel according to St Matthew, St Luke, and so on, conveying the same idea. The *Gospel* is thus both a message and a story. In both Sanskrit and Bengali, again, the word *Kathamrita* means a message and a life story. But the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is unique in that it has something more. Besides being a message and a story, it also contains some other valuable contributions by the author, such as conversations he had with others about Sri Ramakrishna when the Master was not present, his personal observations and reflections on the Master, or his explanatory comments on the Master's statements. Again, as a prelude to his presentation of the Master's conversations with others, M sometimes gives a graphic description of the setting to recreate the environment. Then he has also included over 350 songs, sung either by the Master himself or by others in his presence. Besides all this, there is something more in the *Gospel*: if we study it carefully, we can find in it the autobiography of M himself. Some of these points will be discussed later.

The Diary

We shall briefly survey a history of this work. From the *Gospel* we find that M first met Sri Ramakrishna on a Sunday sometime in March 1882. Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886, but the accounts of M's meetings with him run only till 24 April 1886. Sometime after he first met Sri Ramakrishna, M started recording the meetings in his diary. Once, even during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime, Girish Chandra Ghosh, another householder

disciple of the Master, asked M about his diary. M replied that it was for his personal use. In fact, he began using it for his own spiritual practice. At night he noted down in his diary the Master's conversations, and later, whenever he found time, contemplated on its contents. He would think about a particular scene associated with the Master and derive great joy by recreating the scene and pondering on it. Actually, this is a traditional, important spiritual practice in the Hindu devotional path. Later M admitted that he had contemplated on every scene more than a hundred times before he wrote it in its present form.

The Format Changes

But then, probably in the year 1889, three years after the passing away of the Master, a book appeared in Calcutta under the title *Paramahamser Ukti* (Sayings of the Paramahansa). Sri Ramakrishna was then popularly known by the name Paramahansa. According to the book, it was published by Satchidananda Gitaratna, and the materials were collected by Sadhu Mahindranath Gupta—two pseudonyms of Mahendranath Gupta. He did not disclose his own name. Most likely the book was published in three parts, the last in 1892. Swami Vivekananda read a copy of the first part and immediately wrote to M: 'You have hit Ramakristo [Ramakrishna] in the right point.' However, a few years later M felt that he should present the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna and so changed the format of the teachings. Probably the first person to hear the manuscript read out was Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. On 4 July 1897 she wrote a beautiful letter to M: 'When I heard it from your lips I felt that I was listening to the Master.' Incidentally, Holy Mother helped M in many ways. Without her the *Gospel* would not have seen the light of day.

About his presentation of Sri Ramakrishna, M said in later days: 'The brilliance of a diamond is enhanced by the background. The excellence of a diamond is enhanced or dimin-

ished by the setting in which it is placed.¹² To present Sri Ramakrishna in undiminished brilliance M adopted various means, sometimes even at the cost of his own reputation. But what singularly strikes us is his truthfulness and sincerity.

As M's English Articles

After this, M started writing the *Gospel* in English. The first instalment appeared on 15 October 1897 in the *Brahmavadin*, an English journal published from Madras (now Chennai). And the next instalment was published the following December in the popular English journal *Dawn* of Calcutta. Swami Vivekananda read them both and was very enthusiastic. On 24 November 1897, after reading the first instalment, he wrote to M from Dehra Dun: 'The move is quite original and never before was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing. ... I am really in a transport when I read them.' With all this encouragement, M continued his writing.

As M's Bengali Articles

But then there was a hitch, an objection: Sri Ramakrishna spoke in Bengali. Then why was the material not published in that language? M saw the point and began publishing articles in Bengali. About the same time, he started reading out some of his manuscripts to Sri Ramakrishna's devotees—monastic and lay—at Balaram Bose's house, where devotees met every Sunday after the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897. Everyone who heard those manuscripts encouraged M, who continued publishing them. The articles had a great demand and were published in many Bengali journals, as mentioned before.

Bengali Gospel in Book Form

M was at first hesitant to publish the material in book form. Then Swami Trigunatitananda, a direct disciple of the Master and edi-

tor of the first Bengali journal *Udbodhan*, collected all the Bengali materials already published in journals, and brought out the first volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in 1902 on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. After this M took upon himself the responsibility of publishing the material in book form. Eventually the entire work appeared in five volumes. The first volume was published in 1902, the second in 1904, the third in 1908 and the fourth in 1910. This was the most creative period of M's life.

After bringing out four volumes M got very busy supervising the many reprints. In order to keep the price of the volumes affordably low, he did the proofreading himself. Thus was spent most of his time that he was unable to write more volumes. Even Holy Mother remarked several times: 'There is so much material lying with M. Why doesn't he publish it?' In fact, in his introduction to volume four of the *Kathamrita*, M himself wrote that he had a desire to bring out altogether six or seven volumes and thereafter write an authentic biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Unfortunately, he could not write the biography and could publish only one more volume of the *Kathamrita*. In 1925 he published a Bengali booklet, which now appears as appendix to volume five. The fifth volume was finally completed in 1932, shortly before his passing and published posthumously two and a half months later.

English Articles in Book Form

Well before that, in 1907, M's English articles that had appeared in English journals were collected and published in book form by Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The title of the book was *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (According to M, a Son of the Lord and Disciple)*; or *The Ideal Man for India and for the World*. Interestingly, in the same year Vedanta Society of New York published the same material under the title *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* (authorized edition, edited by Swami Abhedananda). In

1939 the title of the New York edition was changed to *The Memories of Ramakrishna*. Then Swami Nikhilananda translated the entire five-volume *Kathamrita* into English and published it as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in 1942 from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York.

When Did M First Meet the Master?

The period covered in the *Gospel* is from 1 January 1881 to 10 May 1887. But, as mentioned earlier, M first met Sri Ramakrishna sometime in March 1882. Evidently, therefore, the material for the period before that was collected from reliable sources; he himself was not present. But he verified and cross-verified this material before accepting it as authentic. He has covered 181 days in the *Gospel*, out of which his own transcription—that is, the manuscript based on what he himself had seen and heard on the same day, and not material which had not been recorded at the time of the Master, or which was based on hearsay—covers the period of some Sunday in the month of March 1882 to 10 May 1887.

One may wonder, 'Why didn't M mention a definite date of his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna?' Unfortunately, M did not immediately record his first seven meetings with Sri Ramakrishna. He apparently did that later. At that time M was severely frustrated in his family life and intended committing suicide. Driven by circumstances he went to Ishan Kaviraj's home in Baranagore, and from there chanced to meet Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. M lived at Ishan's house for about a month and returned home sometime later. Perhaps he was not decided about what kind of diary to maintain about Sri Ramakrishna.

Thus M was not sure of the exact date when he first met the Master. But he was so sincere and truthful that he would not record something in the book that he did not know to be true. Sometimes he felt that his first meeting with the Master took place in February. During his lifetime, M published twelve editions

of the first volume, and after a few editions he changed the month of his first meeting from March to February. But thereafter he changed it back and stuck to his first impression that he had met the Master on a Sunday in March 1882.

One point needs to be remembered here: M did not consider himself the author of the *Gospel*. In the Bengali *Kathamrita* he categorically stated that it was *Sri Ma Kathita*—as reported by M, and not as written by M. The *Gospel* was not his own creation or a figment of his imagination. On questioned by critics whether he had presented Sri Ramakrishna correctly, M humbly submitted that it was based on his own understanding. For example, on 15 July 1900 he wrote to the great scholar Pramadas Mitra, 'My object has been to present scenes from his daily life as well as teachings as I understand them.'

But there is another reason why M did not consider himself the *Gospel's* author. He sincerely believed that he was but an instrument, a machine, in the hands of his master Sri Ramakrishna. As M himself said: 'Have I composed this? The Master himself has done his work. Appearing in me as the intellect and will power, the Master made me write. He is the master; he is the doer—whether we understand this or not.'³ And elsewhere M made his position still clearer when he said, 'He [the Master] is everything. So long as the tram car is connected to the live wire, the car moves, the lamps burn, and the fans work. But the moment the car is detached, nothing works. Now I fully realize that taking me by the hand he is prodding me forward, and he will surely lead me for the rest of my life.'⁴

On 'Woman and Gold'

'Woman and gold' is a significant expression that merits some discussion. Even today there appears to be some misunderstanding about this. Two things need to be noted here: First of all, the Master had many women devotees. But whenever he talked to them no men

devotees were present, M included—as was the custom in Bengal then. That is why in the *Gospel* except for a brief reference to women now and then, men dominate the work. To his men devotees the Master used to say in Bengali, ‘Beware of *kamini-kanchana*.’ The literal translation of ‘*kamini-kanchana*’ is ‘woman and gold’. But while talking to his women devotees, as recorded elsewhere, he would say, ‘Beware of *purusha-kanchana*, men and gold.’

Second, Swami Vivekananda was aware that the expression *kamini-kanchana* was likely to be misunderstood. When he met Prof Max Müller on 28 May 1896 at Müller’s Oxford residence, Müller mentioned that he wanted to write a biography of Sri Ramakrishna and present his teachings, but needed material for the work. On 24 June 1896 Swami Vivekananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda in Calcutta, asking him to collect authentic sayings of the Master, translate them and send them directly to Max Müller. In that letter Swamiji warned Ramakrishnananda to be careful so that the translations did not create any misunderstanding. For example, Swamiji said: ‘For the words “*kamini-kanchana*”, write “lust and gold”; that is, the universal spirit of his message needs to be expressed.’ ‘Lust and gold’ covers both *purusha-kanchana* and *kamini-kanchana*.

According to a reliable source, when Swami Nikhilananda translated the *Kathamrita* into English, first he translated ‘*kamini-kanchana*’ as ‘lust and gold’, remembering Swami Vivekananda’s instruction to Swami Ramakrishnananda. He was then helped by a woman devotee and a monk, both American. The woman devotee, quite powerful, objected and said: ‘Why should you change it, Swami? You should give the literal meaning so it will touch our hearts.’ That is how it became ‘woman and gold’ in Swami Nikhilananda’s translation. Unfortunately, this expression has given rise to a lot of misunderstanding. But we all know what great respect Sri Ramakrishna had for women.

The Picture of the Mother Bird

There is another point of interest in the *Gospel*: On 24 August 1882, a few months after M’s first meeting with the Master, Sri Ramakrishna said to him, ‘The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self. You can recognize such a man by merely looking at him. His eyes are half open with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes. Can you show me such a picture?’⁵

M said he would try to get one, but could not during Sri Ramakrishna’s lifetime. Later, he had such a picture painted, which is among his collection. It is a beautiful colour painting. And this is the picture he got printed in black and white on the first page of all the volumes of the Bengali *Kathamrita*. We might call this picture a logo for the book. A logo is a printed symbol carrying a special message. If you look carefully at that picture of the mother bird, you will find that it tallies with M’s portrayal of Sri Ramakrishna in the *Gospel*. It was twilight when M met the Master for the first time. Sri Ramakrishna began making enquiries about him. But at the same time he seemed to be absent-minded. Afterwards M discovered that in the evenings the Master would contemplate on the Divine Mother, and would often appear to be absent-minded like this. Not only that; occasionally he would go into deep ecstasies, losing all external consciousness. And if one reads the *Gospel* carefully one will find that Sri Ramakrishna has been portrayed from the first page to the last as a person whose mind was partially indrawn. With the remaining portion of the mind he interacted with the external world. The beautiful picture of the mother bird in the *Gospel* represents such a great yogi, Sri Ramakrishna. The picture can thus be thought of as a logo.

Two Aspects of the Master

The reader will find in the *Gospel* two distinct descriptions of the Master: (1) Sri Rama-

krishna in his divine play in the company of devotees. In this aspect he talks, sings, dances and goes into ecstasy; visits the devotees in and around Kolkata; and goes to various homes and helps people take to the path of God. (2) This picture in contrast is evident from M's beautiful description of his fourth meeting with the Master. That evening M found the Master alone, pacing back and forth in the natmandir in front of the Kali temple. From the single lamp in the spacious natmandir, the light and darkness of the evening merged into a kind of mystic twilight in which the figure of the Master could be dimly seen. Alone, without any companion, and with his mind indrawn, he was moving just as a lion moves about in the forest. The lion loves to stay alone and walk alone. A man of independent spirit, Sri Ramakrishna was merged in the bliss of the Atman. In the *Gospel* we often find Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy, free from any external consciousness. He plunges into samadhi and enjoys the true freedom of the Atman. Independent of others, including society and social obligations, the Master becomes absorbed in the glory of the Atman.

In the *Gospel* there is an artistic mingling

of these two aspects of the Master: a Vishishtadvaitin (a qualified non-dualist) and an Advaitin par excellence. As a Vishishtadvaitin Sri Ramakrishna is aware of the dualities of this world as also of the joy of realizing God—the bestower of both sorrow and happiness—and devotes himself to helping others attain the bliss of God-realization. As an Advaitin, his mind soars far above the world of dualities. He sees that all is God, and that the world is nothing more than an illusion. These two perceptive descriptions of the Master make the *Gospel* a fascinating work.

(to be concluded)

References

1. *Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajīvanam
kavībhīṛīḍitaṁ kalmaṣāpaham;
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmadātataṁ
bhuvi grṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ.*
—*Srīmad Bhagavata*, 10.31.9.
2. *Sri Ma Darshan*, 4.118.
3. *Udbodhan*, 67.434.
4. *Udbodhan*, 65.316.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 113.

Drop It!

A man came to Buddha with an offering of flowers in his hands. Buddha looked up at him and said, 'Drop it!'

He couldn't believe he was being asked to drop the flowers. But then it occurred to him that offering something with the left hand was inauspicious and impolite; he was probably being asked to drop the flowers in his left hand. So he dropped those flowers.

Still Buddha said, 'Drop it!'

This time he dropped all the flowers and stood empty-handed. Buddha again said with a smile, 'Drop it!'

Perplexed, the man asked, 'What is it I am supposed to drop?'

'Not the flowers, son, but the one who brought them,' was Buddha's reply.

Jābāla Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Section Six

The supremacy of the *paramahansa* group [of *sannyāsins*] above all the rest

परमहंस्यपूगस्य सर्वोत्कृष्टता

तत्र परमहंसा नाम संवर्तकारुणिश्वेतकेतुदुर्वासक्रभुनिदाघजडभरतदत्तात्रेयरैवतकप्रभृतयोऽव्यक्तलिङ्गा
अव्यक्ताचारा अनुन्मत्ता उन्मत्तवदाचरन्तः ॥१॥

1. There are [*sannyāsins*, sages] called *paramahansas*: Samvartaka, Āruṇi, Śvetaketu, Durvāsa, R̥bhu, Nidāgha, Jaḍabharata, Dattātreya, Raivataka and others, with no outward or distinguishing marks [of *sannyāsa*], with [spiritual] conduct not manifest [outside; that is, not seen by people of the world], and who behave like insane persons although remaining perfectly sane.

Characteristics of the *paramahansa* who remains clothed

साम्बरपरमहंसलक्षणम्

त्रिदण्डं कमण्डलुं शिष्यं पात्रं जलपवित्रं शिखां यज्ञोपवीतं चेत्येतत्सर्वं भूः स्वाहेत्यप्सु परित्यज्यात्मानम-
न्विच्छेत् ॥२॥

2. Reciting [the *mantra*] ‘*Bhūh svāhā*’, he discards in water [of a river or pond] all of the [following things, namely] the threefold [emblematic] staff,² the water pot, the sling [to carry whatever scanty personal belongings he has], the [alms-] bowl, the cloth [tied to the staff] for purifying water, tuft of hair and sacred thread; and devotes himself [totally] to the [realization of] the Self or Ātman.

Characteristics of the *paramahansa* who remains unclad

दिगम्बरपरमहंसलक्षणम्

यथाजातरूपधरो निर्द्वन्द्वो निष्परिग्रहः तत्त्वब्रह्ममार्गे सम्यक्संपन्नः शुद्धमानसः प्राणसंधारणार्थं यथोक्तकाले
विमुक्तो भैक्षमाचरन्नुदरपात्रेण लाभालाभौ समौ भूत्वा शून्यागारदेवगृहतृणकूटवल्मीकवृक्षमूलकुलालशालागिहोत्र-
शालानदीपुलीनगिरिकुहरकन्दरकोटरनिर्झरस्थण्डिलेष्वात्मनिकेतवास्यप्रयतो निर्ममः शुक्लध्यानपरायणोऽध्यात्मनिष्ठः
शुभाशुभकर्मनिर्मूलनपरः संन्यासेन देहत्यागं करोति स परमहंसो नाम । इत्युपनिषत् ॥३॥

3. [The *paramahansa sannyāsin*] remains unclad [literally, as nude as when he was born of the womb];³ is free from the pairs of opposites⁴ [like cold-heat and joy-sorrow]; [firmly established in the virtue of] non-receiving of gifts;⁵ [remains] well established in the path of the truth of Brahman;⁶ is endowed with a pure mind, free from ignorance [or its products, which are the world, body, and so on]; receives alms in the [alms-] bowl of his stomach⁷ at the prescribed time [just] to sustain life;⁸ remains equanimous in gain or loss;⁹ does not possess any home for shelter;¹⁰ [but takes shelter wherever he finds one, be it] in a deserted house, temple, haystack, anthill, foot of a tree, potter’s hut, a place where the ritualistic fire (for *agnihotra* ritual) is kept, sandy bank of a river, a mountain cave, the cavity or hollow of a tree or a piece of land near a wa-

terfall; makes no effort [with regard to anything concerning the external or the internal]; is free from the idea of 'mine';¹¹ is absorbed solely in Brahman-Awareness;¹² is devoted to the Ātman;¹³ is intent on eradicating [both] good and bad actions;¹⁴ [finally,] he gives up his body by renunciation¹⁵ [of his individuality and little ego]. He indeed is the *paramahansa* [*sannyāsin*].

Thus [ends] the Upaniṣad.

✱

Notes

1. These *paramahansas* belonging to the highest class of *sannyāsins* are so fully absorbed in the absolute Brahman (or their higher Self, the Ātman) that it is impossible for ordinary people to recognize their high spiritual state from their outward behaviour and conduct. They do not care to put on any insignia of *sannyāsa*—they may not even wear the ochre robe of the *sannyāsin*. They shy away from society and avoid the company of people in general; their conduct therefore remains unseen by most people. On account of their inwardness and spiritual absorption, their conduct and behaviour appear as those of mad people from the point of the worldly-wise. But whatever they do, impelled by their pure mind and God-absorbed consciousness, is for the good of the world and for curing people of their 'madness' for the sense-world.
2. An ascetic (monk) traditionally carries a staff, called *daṇḍa*, emblematic of having entered the monastic calling. *Daṇḍa* in Sanskrit means 'restraint', 'control'. There are three kinds of *daṇḍas*: *vāgdaṇḍa*, restraint in speech; *kāyadaṇḍa*, control of the body; and *manodaṇḍa*, control of the mind (*Manusmṛti*, 11.10). That is why some monks carry a threefold staff (*tridaṇḍa* like *triśūla*). The *daṇḍa* carried by an ascetic monk is thus symbolic of total self-control.
3. He remains in his natural state (nude) as at the time of birth: pure and innocent like a newborn.
4. He remains equanimously poised amidst these extremes.
5. Excepting perhaps the barest minimum of food required to sustain life.
6. The actual phrase used in the text is *tattva-brahma-mārga*, which Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets as follows: *tattva* is the Reality, Brahman alone without any other external objects; *mārga* is the path to realize that Brahman, that is, the Knowledge of Brahman. Thus *tattva-brahma-mārga* means 'in the Knowledge of Brahman'.
7. That is, he does not carry any vessel or bowl for receiving alms. He just opens his mouth and receives into it whatever little he is offered, swallowing it quietly, without any thought of taste.
8. He is content with whatever bare minimum of food he is given—just the minimum required to keep the body and soul together.
9. That is, he does not give undue importance to getting or not getting alms (food). He remains equally calm whether he gets alms or not.
10. The technical name for such a person is *aniketa*, literally, 'homeless'.
11. That is, free from any sense of possessiveness.
12. Actually, the text states *śukla-dhyāna-parāyaṇa*, which literally means 'devoted to bright (pure) meditation'. Commenting on this, Upaniṣad Brahmayogin invokes the *śruti* passage that equates with Brahman *śukla-tejo-niṣṭham* or *śukla-tejo-rūpam* (devoted to pure light or of the form of pure light). He thus interprets *śukla-dhyāna-parāyaṇa* as meaning *brahma-mātra-bhāvāpanna*, that is, absorbed solely in Brahman-awareness.
13. Devoted only to the Ātman, having achieved perfection in disowning (or denying) the non-Ātman. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.
14. Action or *karma* of any type does not touch him in the least—be it good action (*niṣkāma karma*) or bad action (*sakāma karma*), for he has realized his identity with the actionless Self (*niṣkriya-ātman*).
15. Renunciation (*sannyāsa*) is the giving up of the false identification with the body-mind complex; renouncing even the idea 'I am renouncing'. Such a *paramahansa sannyāsin* is verily the Supreme Self, Paramātmān. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.

❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

Renunciation Born of Devotion

It was Ramanujacharya's lifelong habit to bathe in the Kaveri every morning. When he grew old he would lean on the shoulder of one of his brahmin followers on his way to the river, but, curiously enough, after his bath he preferred to take the help of Dhanurdas, one of his non-brahmin disciples. This struck the puritanical brahmins as odd, more so because Dhanurdas' life before he received Ramanuja's grace was none too pure. Some of them even hinted that Ramanuja's behaviour was unbecoming.

To justify his action, and to bring Dhanurdas' character to light, Ramanuja hit upon a plan. One night, when they were fast asleep, he tore off a piece from each of the brahmins' dhotis. When they woke up next morning and discovered the mischief, the brahmins suspected one another and began to quarrel among themselves noisily. Ramanuja had to summon them to his presence and distribute new dhotis to keep them from coming to blows! However, he did not divulge the secret.

A few days later Ramanuja called the brahmins and told them that he needed their help to test Dhanurdas. The brahmins were secretly delighted. Ramanuja said: 'I shall detain Dhanurdas at the temple until after midnight on the pretext of satsang. Meanwhile, I want you to bring me all the gold that he has, including Hemamba's ornaments.' Hemamba was Dhanurdas' wife, but the brahmins were ready for anything.

They approached Dhanurdas' house at dusk and waited until night fell and Hemamba retired. Then they stealthily entered the house under cover of darkness and began collecting whatever gold and silver they could lay their hands on. But Hemamba was not yet asleep. Even in the darkness she saw their

shadowy figures enter and understood that they were temple brahmins who had come to steal. The innocent woman imagined that poverty had driven them to stealing. So she pretended to snore, so that the intruders went about their business without fear. After they had bundled the booty, the brahmins came to Hemamba's sleeping form and began deftly removing her jewellery. In order to make it easy for them to remove all the ornaments that she was wearing, Hemamba turned over. But that had just the opposite effect—the brahmins panicked and fled!

Hearing them enter the temple compound Ramanuja granted leave to Dhanurdas. When he had left, the brahmins came in. Ramanuja told them: 'Now follow him home and report back to me what you see.'

On reaching home, Dhanurdas heard the story from his wife. He felt very sad and said: 'I think you have allowed your love of gold to get the better of you. In your anxiety to save worthless tinsel, you have in fact lost a chance to get rid of it. The thing is, you still think these ornaments to be *yours*, that *you* are giving them away. Had you resigned yourself to God's will and remained still, things would have been different.' Owning up to her mistake, Hemamba prayed with tears in her eyes, 'Lord, please bless me so that such egotism never again finds place in my mind.'

Back at the temple, the brahmins related what they had seen to Ramanuja. 'It must be admitted that the couple appear to have some respect for us brahmins,' they observed rather superciliously. 'Yes. And this is the stuff over which you so-called brahmins nearly came to blows,' shot back Ramanuja, showing them the pieces of cloth torn from their dhotis.' The brahmins had their answer. *

Blessings in Return for Blows

Samartha Ramdas, Shivaji's guru, was travelling with twenty disciples to Shivaji's kingdom. On the way they found a wonderful sugar cane field. Hungry after a long walk, the disciples decided to help themselves with the sugar canes. The guru sat under a tree while the disciples ate as much as they liked. As ill luck would have it, the owner of the field found them out and thrashed the guru and his disciples mercilessly. The realized teacher just smiled and went with his disciples to Shivaji's palace.

The king received them well and made arrangements for their stay. While rendering personal service to his guru by giving him an oil bath the next day, Shivaji saw lash marks

all over his guru's body and asked him about them. Ramdas said nothing in reply. But Shivaji learnt about the whole thing from the disciples. Immediately he sent for the farmer and made him stand in the open court. When the farmer saw his victim sitting on the throne and the king serving him, he was shocked and fell prostrate before Ramdas and begged pardon. The king asked the guru, 'What punishment is to be given to this cruel farmer?'

The compassionate guru told the king to give him twenty-five villages as compensation for the loss of his sugar canes. The farmer was moved by the guru's gesture and sense of justice. *

Tukaram's Compassion

The fame of Sant Tukaram, the famous saint of Maharashtra, had spread everywhere. Thousands were attracted by his soul-stirring kirtans.

There was a devotee who was so fascinated by his divine songs that he began to neglect his home, duty and all. His wife was deeply concerned at his indifference. Her anger turned against Tukaram, who she thought was responsible for her husband's callousness. She waited for an opportunity to kill the saint.

On his usual rounds every morning to different homes to beg for alms, Tukaram came to this devotee's house. The devotee welcomed the saint and offered him a cup of milk. When Tukaram was drinking it, the devotee's wife poured boiling oil on Tukaram's head. Unperturbed, the saint mentally offered to his Lord Panduranga both the sweetness of the milk and the heat of the boiling oil.

God protected the saint and sent his blessings to the couple in different ways: to the

husband in the form of spiritual illumination and to the wife in the form of blisters all over her body. Unable to bear the excruciating pain she fell at Tukaram's feet and prayed to be cured.

The saint prayed to his Lord to relieve her of the suffering. The pain immediately vanished and with it all the blisters!

Now Tukaram asked her, 'My daughter, what was your intention in pouring boiling oil on my head?'

She replied, 'O holy one, I was not aware of your greatness and was foolish enough to try to kill you.'

The saint said smilingly, 'Don't you know, my sweet daughter, that Tukaram's ego, which you wanted to kill, died long ago when he was initiated into spiritual life with the Lord's holy name? All that is left in him now is Lord Panduranga and nothing else. Everything is His glory.'

The lady prayed for his forgiveness and from then on became his devoted disciple. *

A Tribute to the Spiritual Oneness of Humanity

An Interfaith Service for Peace and Unity

As New York observed the first anniversary of the terrible events of 11 September 2001, the 'Spiritual Oneness of Humanity' was the theme of a unique event held at the New School University Tishman Auditorium. On Sunday, 22 September 2002, spiritual leaders of all centres of the Ramakrishna Order in the United States and Canada came together in New York for an event organized by Swami Adiswarananda, spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York. The following swamis of the North American centres participated in the programme: Swami Swahananda (Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood), Swami Pramathananda (Vedanta Society of Toronto, Canada), Swami Prabuddhananda (Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco), Swami Aparananda (Vedanta Society of Berkeley, California), Swami Chidananda (Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago), Swami Bhaskarananda (Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle), Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri), Swami Shantarupananda (Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon), Swami Prapannananda (Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California), Swami Tyagananda (Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston), Swami Yogatmananda (Vedanta Society of Providence, Rhode Island).

Swami Prabhananda (Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata) and Swami Jitatmananda (Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot) were special invitees from India. Other participants were Rabbi Joseph H Gelberman (Founder and Director of the New Synagogue and All Faiths Seminary of New York); Father



A view of the platform and audience

Patrick Fitzgerald, OFM (St Francis of Assisi Church and Friary of New York); Dr P Jayaraman (Executive Director of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan USA, New York); and several musical artists.

More than 500 persons filled to capacity the beautiful Tishman Auditorium of the New School University of New York to see and listen to such a large gathering of the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order and other religious leaders. As the programme began, the entire congregation rose in respect for the swamis

and distinguished participants, who entered the hall and proceeded to the platform while the choir of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center performed Vedic chanting and the 'Narayana Sukta'. It was a rare and beautiful scene to see the long procession of spiritual leaders assembling on the brilliantly lit platform decorated with floral arrangements and colourful banners.

Audience Gathered for the Historic Event

On behalf of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, Swami Adiswarananda

pointed out: 'Our world is standing at a crossroads: scientific, technological and economic advances are fast changing the world culture, making it heavily pluralistic and multi-racial. We are seeing worldwide upheavals, breakdown of totalitarian regimes, awakening of the human spirit, and fervent calls for freedom and democracy. Unity in diversity is the motto of our times. In spite of destructive forces all around us, we remember and find hope in the words spoken by Swami Vivekananda at the famous Parliament of Religions in 1893: *"Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance: Help and not Fight, Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."*

Swami Adiswarananda went on to tell the audience: 'Each of the revered swamis and religious leaders assembled on this platform work selflessly and tirelessly to further the causes of peace, tolerance and unity. It is our fervent belief that the prayers uttered from this platform will serve as a positive force for the good of our world.' In conclusion, the swami prayed: 'May the Supreme Lord, seated in the hearts of all beings, hear our prayers, bless us,

grant us strength and courage to persevere and hasten the day when people of all faiths, cultures, nations and traditions may live together in peace and harmony.'

A Bouquet of Tributes for Peace and Unity

These introductory remarks were then followed by tributes from each of the swamis and distinguished participants on the theme



Swami Adiswarananda introducing the participants

nanda welcomed the participants and everyone present and then introduced each of the distinguished participants. In his introductory remarks the swami spoke of the need to make sincere and intense efforts towards a more peaceful world, calling attention to the disturbing incidents of violence and hatred in recent days that had caused many to feel 'helpless, confused, vulnerable and fearful for the future of our small planet'. The swami

of the 'Spiritual Oneness of Humanity', each presentation ending with a prayer for world peace and unity. As a symbol of their prayer, each speaker placed a long-stemmed red rose in a crystal vase at the centre of the platform, and when all prayers had finally been offered, the bouquet of red roses remained as a symbolic representation of the combined prayers of all the participants.

While each of the speakers approached the theme in a different way, the overall message was clearly this: Though apparently elusive, true peace is indeed attainable, but all of us need to strive for it on a personal level and make spirituality an integral part of life. Every individual needs to become a fit instrument of peace. This message was perhaps best illustrated in the presentation by Rabbi Gelberman, who made the point in a somewhat humorous manner by recounting a dream in which he had gone to heaven and upon arriving there was delighted to meet all of the world's past prophets, saints and incarnations of God, among whom he noticed Moses, Jesus, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Ramakrishna and many others. When in his dream they asked if he had any questions or anything to say, Rabbi Gelberman replied that indeed he did have this question: 'What,' he asked, 'are all of you doing up here? Don't you see how much the world below is suffering? Won't you come down and help? Won't one of you come? I don't care which one, at least one of you should come!' The rabbi continued: 'Hearing my fervent appeal, Sri Ramakrishna immediately stepped forward and said to me: "My dear rabbi, don't you know that *we are ready* to come? *We are always ready*. But unfortunately all of you *are not ready*. The day you

make yourselves ready, surely you will find us right there with you.'"

Father Patrick Fitzgerald, a monk of the Order of St Francis of Assisi, made the final presentation. During his talk, Father Patrick reminisced about his close friend, Father Mychal Judge, who was chaplain to the New York City Fire Department and became one of the first to lose his life at the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. Father Mychal was also a good friend of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York and a frequent participant in its interfaith events. The loss of this loving and caring monk has been widely felt throughout the city and country by the many individuals and groups whose lives he touched. Father Patrick concluded his remarks, as Father Mychal often did, by repeating the famous prayer of St Francis: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.'



A view of the congregation

Following Father Patrick's presentation, Swami Adiswarananda requested everyone present to join in a moment of silent prayer and meditation for world peace and unity.

A number of musical offerings added variety to the programme: Jan Gelberman, an accomplished musical artiste, performed her new song *With Love to Share*, dedicated to all the victims and heroes of 11 September; and the talented young violinist Nicole Leon gave a masterful performance of the exciting *Intro-*

duction and Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 28, by Camille Saint-Saëns. As a finale of the programme, the choir of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center performed its musical rendition of *The Living God*, with words taken from the poems and letters of Swami Vivekananda. The choir's performance was enhanced by the projection on a large screen of many images appropriate to the words of the song, with a mosaic of photographs of people of all ages, races, nationalities and religious traditions. The projected images ended with the message of the Vedas: *Truth is One; sages call It by various*

names. Swami Adiswarananda then thanked the distinguished participants and the audience and brought the programme to a conclusion with a prayer, after which the swamis and participants proceeded out of the hall to the sound of the cathedral organ and the prolonged applause of the appreciative congregation.

Reception at Vivekananda Vidyapith

Following the Sunday morning programme, in the evening, the swamis were taken by bus to a special reception and programme in their honour at Vivekananda Vidyapith in Wayne, New Jersey—a model institution dedicated to the character-building education of young people, based on the moral and spiritual ideals of Swami Vivekananda. The reception was attended by more than 400 of the Vidyapith's students, alumni, parents and friends, who felt greatly inspired and blessed to have the swamis in their midst. The swamis were extremely pleased to see the discipline and devotion of the Vidyapith members and students.



Swamis at Vivekananda Vidyapith

Seated from left to right: Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society of St Louis, Missouri), Swami Adiswarananda (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York), Swami Pramathananda (Vedanta Society of Toronto, Canada), Swami Tathagatananda (Vedanta Society of New York), Swami Prabuddhananda (Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco), Swami Prabhananda (Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, India); Standing from left to right: Swami Vidananda (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York), Swami Tyagananda (Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston, Massachusetts), Swami Jitatananda (Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Rajkot, India), Swami Bhaskarananda (Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle), Swami Prapannananda (Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California), Swami Chidananda (Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, Illinois), Swami Shantarupananda (Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon), Swami Yogatmananda (Vedanta Society of Providence, Rhode Island)

Homage to the Legacy of Vivekananda

Two memorable programmes presented by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan USA, New York, preceded the above-described events of 22 September: On Saturday, 14 September, at the Haft Audito-

rium of the State University of New York, a reception was held by the Bhavan in honour of the Prime Minister of India, Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was in New York to take part in the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly. The reception for the Prime Minister was planned to inaugurate the Bhavan's forthcoming programme 'An Homage to the Legacy of Swami Vivekananda'. As a highlight of the event, the Prime Minister released the first copies of the Bhavan's new pictorial book *Swami Vivekananda: The Prophet of India*. The Prime Minister presented the first copies of the book to Swami Adiswarananda, Swami Tathagatananda of the Vedanta Society of New York, and to a number of young scholars and other recipients. In his remarks, the Prime Minister, an admirer of Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Order, referred to the great Swami Vivekananda as 'the spiritual leader of India' and described Swamiji as a source of inspiration to all of India's leaders and to the nation as a whole. The large

audience of nearly 1000 people was greatly moved to witness the humility of this leader of one of the world's great nations as he went forward to salute Swami Adiswarananda by touching his feet in the traditional manner of India—a moment that was captured in a photograph and later widely circulated in the media and on the Internet.

One week later, on Saturday, 21 September, once again at the Haft Auditorium, the Bhavan presented its day-long program, 'An Homage to the Legacy of Swami Vivekananda', at which talks were given by the spiritual leaders of all Ramakrishna Order centres of North America. Approximately 1000 people attended the event and listened with great interest as the swamis discussed different aspects of the life and message of Swami Vivekananda and his lasting contribution to India and the world. *

First Aid

A woman was leaning over the victim of a street accident and the crowd was looking on.

Suddenly she was roughly pushed aside by a man who said, 'Step back, please, I've had a course in first aid.'

The woman looked on for a few minutes while the man got busy with the victim. Then she said calmly, 'When you come to the part where you have to send for the doctor, I'm already here.'

Often than you imagine, the doctor is already there—inside the person you are attempting to help! So why bother with first aid? Summon the doctor!

Enlightened Self-interest

A farmer, whose corn always took the first prize at the state fair, had the habit of sharing his best corn seed with all the farmers in the neighbourhood. When asked why, he said, it's really a matter of self-interest. The wind picks up the pollen and carries it from field to field. So if my neighbours grow inferior corn, the cross-pollination brings down the quality of my own corn. That's why I am concerned that they plant only the very best.'

—Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*, 2.188, 173



Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

The Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy.
Swami Harshananda. Ramakrishna Math,
Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019.
2000. x + 114 pp. Rs 30.

In this introductory book the author has given some important characteristics of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The book consists of seven chapters: (1) General Introduction, (2) Nyāya Darśana, (3) Vaiśeṣika Darśana, (4) Sāṅkhya Darśana, (5) Yoga Darśana, (6) Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Darśana, and (7) Vedānta Darśana.

The chapter on general introduction consists of the salient features of the six systems. The author emphasizes here the need for philosophical thinking. The second chapter outlines Nyāya briefly and says that it provides a basic methodology in terms of its epistemology. The author deals with the four sources of knowledge, or *pramāṇas*: perception (*pratyakṣa*), valid inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*) and verbal testimony (*śabda*). Nyāya logic formulates the five-part valid syllogism, which is employed to separate valid arguments from invalid ones. This system helps in correct reasoning and detection of fallacies in thinking. Nyāya metaphysics is basically realistic because it accepts the reality of the external world and also non-empirical objects. Gautama is the founder of the Nyāya system.

The third chapter on Kaṇāda Maharṣi's Vaiśeṣika is a brief description of the seven categories: *dravya*, *guṇa*, *karma*, *sāmānya*, *viśeṣa*, *samavāya* and *abhāva*. Vaiśeṣikas accept only four *pramāṇas*: perception, inference, memory and verbal testimony. The fourth chapter is about the Sāṅkhya school, which elucidates the basic categories of Puruṣa and Prakṛiti. The Puruṣas are innumerable and they need independence (*kaivalya*) from the bondage of Prakṛiti. How to attain this freedom is the theme of this system.

The fifth chapter is about Yoga. It consists of a brief discussion of the eightfold path. There is also a

brief discussion of the nature and function of the mind, and the techniques of regulating the mind.

The sixth chapter is about Mīmāṃsā Darśana. Swami Harshanandaji discusses here the theory of knowledge and lists some basic works of this school. This system primarily aims at giving a methodology of interpretation concerning Vedic injunctions. According to the Mīmāṃsakas, knowledge (*pramā*) should yield some new information previously unknown, and it should not be contradicted by any other knowledge. The metaphysics of Mīmāṃsā is realistic. The world and souls are real.

The seventh chapter on Vedānta makes a rapid survey of the important systems of Vedānta, along with a concise synopsis of the original metaphysical views of the *Brahma Sūtras*. The author gives a list of twelve commentators on the *Brahma Sūtras*.

The book is quite useful for beginners. The reader will be benefited by the simple way philosophy has been presented here, and also by the list of classical works cited in every chapter for further study. The author has done an important work by inviting people to study philosophy. He deserves the thanks of the literary community and the readers.

Dr R I Ingallali

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Quest for Monism (Vivekachudamani for Beginners). *Swami Ramanujananda.*
Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Thir-
ssur 680 551. 2001. 102 pp. Rs 35.

This is another compact but useful contribution from Swami Ramanujanandaji and is published as a sequel to his earlier book, *Quest for Knowledge (Gita for Beginners)*, which presents the gist of the *Gita* in question-answer form.

The book under review is also in a question-answer format and weaves within itself the philoso-

phy of Advaita Vedanta as propounded in Acharya Shankara's masterpiece *Vivekachudamani*. The author himself has framed the questions, answers to which are given in a simple, charming manner. The purpose of human birth, liberation from bondage, requirements for receiving knowledge from the guru, necessity of a guru, qualifications of the spiritual aspirant and the guru, gross and subtle bodies, the five sheaths, different states of consciousness, the three gunas, powers of maya, purification of mind, identity of jiva and Brahman, and savikalpa and nirvikalpa samadhis—these are the topics covered in the book. In short, this work clarifies everything—the goal to be attained and the preparations for the spiritual journey that leads the aspirant to the realization of non-dualism or Advaita.

The language and presentation in this book make philosophical ideas easily understandable. The glossary at the end enhances its value.

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Tapping Your Inner Strength. *Edith Henderson Grotberg*. New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase 1, New Delhi 110 028. 2001. 188 + viii pp. Rs 175.

With all its advantages, modern society has put a great deal of stress by constantly bringing to its populace unnatural and severe adversities at every turn. This kind of living kills the kindliness of the human heart while eroding traditional morals and values. While the onus is on the individuals to outperform, the individuals themselves are ill-equipped to meet the challenges. Today's growing children soon discover in everything poisonous fumes that arise at the slightest rubbing. The result is tremendous conscious and unconscious pressures not only at home and school but at every station of life. If one is not prepared, these stations of life turn into what medieval literature calls 'miserable caravanserais of the world'.

Resilience is the one medicine that is required of people. Everyone has an abstract idea of what it is, and every one of us has now and then drawn on resilience to resist or overcome obstacles. But nobody has succeeded in training himself step by step in this indispensable quality of mankind. In fact, man's resilience has helped make great progress to-

wards conquering external nature. This quality has now become an urgent utility in man's internal world, where the fight is more intense, the struggle more gruesome, because it is a question of not being mowed and dragged down towards the flimsy and ever-shifting line of neurosis.

Tapping Your Inner Strength—How to Find the Resilience to Deal with Anything shows certain traits in us that need development. It also systematizes what we unconsciously know but cannot articulate. The speciality of this work is that it does not take a reader to be a mere passive subject but an active participant. And if anyone thinks of going through this book without a pencil and without the necessary courage and industry to delve into his personality, to be honest about self-examination, to jog old memories and judge both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, he will be in for insipid reading. The author's object is to educate the reader in bringing out the best in himself, by building on the present strengths, overcoming present weaknesses, re-examining experiences of adversity, and applying resilience techniques for himself and others.

The author's mission has been to learn how people deal with adversities and how to carry this knowledge to those who need it. Being a psychologist with a long experience in this field, she has met various people, both young and old, all over the world. Published in 1955, her first book *A Guide for Promoting Resilience in Children* was distributed free worldwide by the Bernard van Lee Foundation. This research book naturally contains a greater refinement and advance in her ideas. She is also a senior scientist and managing editor of *Dialogue: Insights into Human Emotions for Creative Professions*. Dr Grotberg's husband, a sociologist and information specialist, has informally aided her.

Tapping Your Inner Strength is divided into three parts; each one fitting another like a glove. In the first part ('Examining and Strengthening Your Resilience Building Blocks'), indispensable things are pointed out: Trust, Autonomy, Initiative, Industry and Identity. Under these headings the author gives a full treatment of current research and makes us pause at every page and puts in queries for the reader to answer; a serious reader just cannot skip pages; even space is provided where written answers are called for. The author herself is impersonal but takes the reader gradually through a process of facing and understanding himself. Anybody will agree that this is the first step in building resil-

ience.

The second part talks of 'Tapping Your Inner Strength in Everyday Life'. It discusses resilience and illness, interpersonal relationships, resilience in the workplace, coping with aging, and the role of cultural beliefs. The third part discusses development of an action plan and coping with disasters.

Briefly, the whole book revolves around three things: 'I have', 'I am' and 'I can'. One is forced to admit that one was not aware that these three simple and self-evident factors had many unknown aspects. The author should be credited for doing justice to them. This book is sure to help anyone who takes the trouble to go through it carefully. Although you might feel that you are studying a textbook with homework sheets attached, the likeness stops there. For the book is really about oneself and overcoming various mental blocks and tapping the existent and abundant resources that lie unused in the human personality.

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Solve Your Problems Astrologically.

Bepin Behari. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 493 pp. Rs 195.

Different types of problems call for different types of solutions. A health problem needs a doctor; a land dispute, legal advice; and other kinds of problems, the services of those proficient in the required discipline. For problems of a personal nature people get guidance from family elders, experienced friends and, sometimes, holy personages. But not many are aware that astrology is a discipline that offers solutions to every kind of problem under the sun. This is precisely what the author, an experienced astrologer, attempts to tell the reader through this book.

The treatment is leisurely and rambling, generally shorn of abstruse technicalities. At certain places, no doubt, there are references to astrological details but they will not deter the lay reader interested in solutions to his problems.

The author adopts a multi-tiered approach. He calls upon the reader to prepare an approximate

chart on principles of astrology he outlines in the appendix. One cannot be too sure if this is the right way to approach astrology as a tool. It is essential that a correctly cast horoscope is obtained first and only then an assessment attempted. The author advises the reader to take up the chart, work out the details and then look for the solutions suggested in the pages. Such advice must be treated gingerly.

The book can be of some use to the serious student or practitioner of astrology. But as far as the layman is concerned, the book is at best good reading material much in the same way a medical book is to the lay reader, by reading which none can be deemed fit to treat himself. Astrology is a serious pursuit that throws light on a variety of life's problems and areas. But this is possible only under the guidance of a competent and qualified astrologer.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, which covers more than half the volume, comprises detailed essays on different areas of life such as personality, health, education, progeny, vocation, friendship, love, marriage, tension, illness and accidents, before embarking on interesting discussions on spiritual life and Self-realization. All these topics are heavily laced with simple astrological generalizations and their application to related issues. The style of presentation appears to be greatly influenced by populist sun-sign books that are produced in the West mostly for their sales potential. A more mature and streamlined approach from the author, known for his esoteric writings and wide experience in the field, would have greatly enhanced the value of the book.

The second part deals with the different planetary factors from an esoteric angle: Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu, Nichabhanga and Sakata Yogas, combustion and retrogression, transits and Nakshatras.

Many of these ideas formulated by the author can facilitate a judicious interpretation if presented in the form of a chart. The style is rather slow but lucid and effortless. Recommended for both the research-minded and the professional alike.

Gayatri Devi Vasudev
Editor, *The Astrological Magazine*
Bangalore

Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 5.409

❧ Reports ❧

Celebrated. Platinum jubilee of Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur, and its school Ramakrishna Gurukula Vidya Mandira; by Sri Sikanter Bakht, Governor of Kerala; on 24 September 2002.

Inaugurated. The new high school building at the Kanyapur Link Road campus of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol; by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 4 October. He also unveiled a statue of Swami Vivekananda in the campus.

Inaugurated. A waiting hall (near Belur Math post office) for pilgrims who visit Belur Math; by Swami Smarananandaji; on 6 October (Swami Akhandanandaji's birthday). On the same day he also inaugurated the new quarters for Veda Vidyalaya staff, built near Sikshanamandira (Saradapitha).

Unveiled. A statue of Swami Vivekananda in Basirhat; by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 9 October. Initiative for the installation of the statue was taken by Ramakrishna Mission, Sikra Kulinigram, with the cooperation of the local municipality.

Launched. www.vedanta.jp, website of Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Japan); in October.

Launched. www.srkmathkanchipuram.org, website of Ramakrishna Math, Kanchipuram; in October.

Opened. An air-conditioned auditorium at Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi; by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Presi-

dent, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 3 November. Next day, Most Revered President Maharaj installed pictures of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda in the centre's shrine.

Concluded. Platinum jubilee celebrations of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi; Swami Gahananandaji, Sri Rama Jois, Governor of Jharkhand, and Sri Inder Singh Namdhari, Speaker, Jharkhand Assembly, addressed public meetings held on 9 and 10 November.

Opened. The newly extended lecture hall Swami Vijnanananda Satsang Bhavan at Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad; by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 13 November. Sri Vishnu Kant Shastri, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, presided over a public meeting organized on the occasion.

Celebrated. Platinum jubilee of Ramakrishna Saradashrama, Ponnampet; from 22 to 24 November. Smt Suma Vasant, Minister for Temple Management, Government of Karnataka, inaugurated the functions and Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka, and several other eminent persons addressed the public meetings organized on the occasion.

Visited. The school run by Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, Fiji; by Mr Ratu Jope Siniloli, Vice President of the Republic of Fiji Islands, on 28 November. On the same day, Mr Kenro Iino, Ambassador of Japan to Fiji, inaugurated a \$200,000 project at the centre's Nawaicoba vocational centre, which includes construction of an office complex, a workshop and classrooms.

Distributed. 2250 kg of rice and 1000 mats; by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; to 500 families of Rutherfordpuram and Meenambalpuram slum areas in Mylapore, Chennai, affected by heavy rains; in November.

Distributed. 420 blankets; by Ramakrishna Math, Puri; to needy people in 4 villages of Gop and Brahmagiri blocks in Puri district; in November.

Handed over. 8 new school buildings built by the Ramakrishna Mission headquarters

and Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Porbandar, in different places of Rajkot and Porbandar districts, Gujarat; to concerned authorities; during September-November. As on 1 December, 77 school buildings out of 80 taken up for construction by the Mission headquarters were handed over and 2 more were completed, while work on the last one was in progress. As on the same date, 282 of the 371 dwelling units taken up for construction had been handed over and work on the remaining 89 units was in progress.

For the Sake of Honour

A reporter asked several people in a small town if they knew the mayor.

‘He’s a liar and a cheat,’ said the gas station attendant.

‘He’s a pompous ass,’ said the schoolteacher.

‘Never voted for him in my life,’ said the druggist.

‘Most corrupt politician I’ve ever known,’ said the barber.

When the reporter finally met the mayor he asked him what kind of salary he received.

‘Good heavens, I don’t get any salary,’ said the mayor.

‘Then why did you take the job?’

‘For the honour.’

—Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*, 2.131

God’s Own

Goldstein, aged ninety-two, had lived through pogroms in Poland, concentration camps in Germany and dozens of other persecutions against the Jews.

‘Oh, Lord!’ he said, ‘Isn’t it true that we are your chosen people?’

A heavenly voice replied, ‘Yes, Goldstein, the Jews are my chosen people.

‘Well, then, isn’t it time you chose somebody else?’